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A

DIALOGUE

ON

PROVIDENCE, FAITH, AND PRAYER.

THIRD EDITION.

PRINTED FOR THE

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PROVIDENCE, FAITH, AND PRAYER.

Vindicate the ways of God to man. — Pope.

Mr and Mrs Henderson had lately buried their eldest daughter, a lovely girl of eighteen. Their feelings on this occasion were such as affectionate parents usually experience when thus severely afflicted. They were amiable people, and had lived together very happily twenty years. They had brought up a family of four children, and had found as much to love and approve in them as they could reasonably hope. Living in the middle ranks of society, as far removed from degradation on one side, as from the circles of fashion on the other, they had escaped, perhaps, the severest trials of virtue. They had passed along so far in life, with no other notoriety than that of being spoken of among the circumscribed number of friends, whom they had attached to themselves, as an inoffensive, kind-hearted, unassuming couple, with a family of orderly and good children, the eldest of whom, now lately deceased, was very lovely in person and mind. Their two sons, one sixteen, and the other fourteen years old, were both apprenticed to substantial good men in the city of Boston, and gave reason to expect that they would satisfy the affectionate and natural

hopes of fond and rational parents. Their youngest child, a daughter of eleven years, was still at school. She had been called home by the sickness of her sister, and with her parents and brothers, had attended and watched the declining young creature, till she sunk under the pressure of her disease, and was relieved by death from all mortal sufferings. Mr and Mrs Henderson at this time experienced feelings, not unusual on such occasions. At first their bodily fatigue, then the excitement of numerous visits of condolence, the sudden relaxation from all personal and mental exertion, and the overpowering sense of their heavy loss, all combined to render their emotions agonizing. For a time they gave themselves up, without restraint, to the indulgence of their grief. But they were sober, temperate people, and under the habitual restraints of reason and religion. Their minister also was kind and sympathizing. He made them frequent visits, and offered them the consolations suggested by his feelings, and his office. The hopes of the christian faith, and the support of philosophy, which he said admirably harmonized with the principles of religion, were pointed out; and he endeavored to convince them of the duty and the wisdom of restraining grief, and subduing all spirit of complaint. They had indeed no disposition to murmur at the dispensations of Providence, and assured their friends they would not, if it were in their power, call back their beloved child from the happy state to which they believed her removed, and again involve her in the trials and troubles of life. "And yet," said Mr Henderson, "it is a dark and mysterious dipensation. I cannot see the hand of a merciful God in it, though I will not say I doubt of God's mercy in anything."

They were alone, when Mr Henderson made this observation to his wife. They had been conversing on the promising qualities of the dear girl they had buried; and the contemplation of the happiness they had hoped to enjoy in her mature years, seemed to aggravate their sense of her loss, and renew their grief for this heavy bereavement. Mr Henderson, particularly, seemed to find it difficult to reconcile his mind entirely to his trouble. He had often manifested this state of feeling, and his wife this evening ventured to remark upon it.

"Your faith appears to me to be weaker than mine," said she, in reply to her husband's observation. "It seems to me that, respecting those dispensations which are involved in the clouds and darkness that are around the throne of God, you have doubts of his mercy, though you are not willing to acknowledge your doubts."

"Can you always perceive the benevolence of God, in every event of life that takes place?" asked Mr Henderson.

"No, my dear," replied his wife, "I do not pretend to be so much clearer sighted than my neighbors; but my not being able to perceive it, does not cause any doubts to arise in my mind respecting the existence of that benevolence."

"Well, I said I did not doubt the mercy of God," interrupted Mr Henderson, "but that I could not see his mercy in all his providences. I wish I could see it, in the case of our dear Elizabeth's death. I must say it would be a great comfort to me."

"But there certainly is a difference in our state of mind," observed Mrs H., "and it seems to me that you feel doubts, and painful ones; while, at the same time, your rational convictions forbid you to doubt. I on the

contrary feel no doubts whatever; and therefore my mind is not painfully disturbed, as yours is."

"I do not exactly comprehend what you say," said her husband. "If you do not feel any doubts whatever, and yet you cannot see any more plainly than I the mercy of God, how do you reconcile these two opposing states of mind? There seems some contradiction in this."

"I will endeavor to explain what I mean," replied Mrs Henderson. "I am deeply convinced that, as a finite being, it is quite impossible for me to comprehend and contain within my mind the views, purposes, and plans of infinite mind. I reason from analogy. I know that anything which is seen in part, any circumstance which is but partly understood, any action the motive of which is hidden, must appear not only imperfect, but often distorted and hideous, when the whole, if seen, would display perfect proportion. The secret intention would show goodness and integrity. In the same way, I think it is owing to our seeing only a part of God's design, that we cannot in every event perceive beauty, consistency, and benevolence. Having satisfied myself by the clearest reasoning that God is infinite mind, and *that* mind infinitely good, whenever any event or course of events appears to speak a different character, instead of doubts arising as to the mercy of God, I immediately advert to my own small and imperfect powers, which are incapable of ever penetrating into the mysterious arrangement of events, and which, seeing only the odds and ends of things, cannot discern the beauty and propriety of the whole design."

"Perhaps it is so," said Mr Henderson, "but I confess there is so much to excite doubt, that it is diffi-

cult, at all times, to satisfy the mind that all things are ordered in mercy; and yet, as an abstract truth, I cannot but allow, that God is a merciful being, infinitely merciful. But when we see a lovely creature, one calculated to be useful, and to diffuse happiness, as well as to enjoy it; one who has lived a pure life, and who constitutes the chief joy and hope of virtuous parents; when we see such an one snatched away from their arms, and laid in the dismal tomb, cut off from the innocent delights of the world, and its improvements, while the hearts of all around are crushed by the heavy affliction; when we see this, and then turn perhaps to our next door neighbor, and find a beastly, intemperate being, who is a plague to all with whom he lives, and who is incapable of either virtue or happiness himself, or increasing that of others; and this useless, miserable wretch is left, while our lovely child is taken away; who can reconcile these things with that perfect benevolence, that is represented always to will kindness and always to be able to bring to pass what it wills?"

"I am sorry to hear you use these terms, my dear," said Mrs Henderson. "I do not like the expression 'snatched away;' it seems to imply that anger, and not benevolence, dictated the dispensation. Without proving anything, such terms operate on the feelings like argument, and therefore we should avoid them. I do not like 'dismal tomb' for the same reason. The grave is represented as the peaceful asylum of suffering, where 'the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest;' and by those who believe it only the receptacle of the once loved, but now resigned body, while the released spirit has risen to happiness and its Maker, it can only be thought of with pensive and holy

pleasure. The delights of life you speak of, and its improvements, what are they, compared with those we believe our darling is now enjoying? Our faith must be aided by reflection, observation, and experience, or we may not be able, in any case, to reconcile the apparent inconsistencies, that catch our attention in the course of events; and we cannot, with all our efforts, often be able to perceive and trace the love and mercy, which yet we may believe guides the superintending hand."

"What I can see, I can believe," said Mr Henderson, "but respecting what I cannot see by any view I can take of a subject, I must still confess, I can never be free from doubts."

"But," said Mrs Henderson, "if those dispensations, which, at the time they occurred, appeared altogether opposed to divine benevolence, have, by the course of subsequent events, evidently displayed that principle, would not such dispensations serve greatly to establish a reliance on God, and faith in his goodness, and prevent the same state of doubt from occurring to you again, when suffering under a painful affliction of the kind you have described?"

"I do not know that it would," replied Mr Henderson. "I have in the course of my life, several times, been thus situated, and have clearly perceived that a circumstance which I deprecated as a great misfortune at the time it occurred has proved in the end a blessing, and that which I hailed as auspicious has turned out a bad business; and yet I have not been so established in the faith you speak of, as always to be able to rely upon it."

"But that is because your early impressions were not in favor of an overruling Providence," said his wife.

"I think it of very great importance that children's minds should be early and deeply impressed with the great and fundamental truths of religion; for I have constantly observed, that the fullest convictions of the understanding in mature life are feeble instruments in removing strong early impressions. If our infant notions are correct, our rational convictions in mature life will confirm them, and our faith will be solid and satisfactory. If, on the contrary, our first ideas are false and deeply impressed, it is next to impossible that the understanding, however clear in its deductions, and sincere in its purpose, should remove the feeling it opposes, so that it will not recur again and again. You were brought up with the notion that chance or destiny ordered all events; and though you have long been convinced, when you reason on the subject, that there is no sound argument to be urged in favor of this opinion, but everything to confirm that of a particular Providence, yet your early impressions remain for your discomfort, whenever any circumstances of a distressing nature occur.

I wish it were possible," she added in an affectionate tone, "to transfer to you the repose and resignation which I enjoy, from having been early impressed with a belief that God is a kind and watchful guardian, who orders all our affairs from benevolent motives."

"I do not see that I can help it," replied Mr Henderson. "I read the books adapted to convince my mind, and then I feel assured. I have studied the New Testament, and am satisfied of its truth. I have made a profession of religion, and wish to be a Christian. What more can I do?"

"My dear husband," said Mrs Henderson, "I will say more of you than you say of yourself. You not

only wish to be a Christian, but you manifest, by a life of strict conformity to the precepts of Jesus Christ, that you really are a Christian, in spirit and life. But you fail of reaping the joys of a Christian, from a want of those feelings of faith, which I enjoy by the blessing of God on my early instruction."

Mr Henderson was affected by this proof of the tender love and approbation of his wife; and moved by that internal feeling of humility, which every real Christian must understand, he said, "do not, my dear, bestow praise like this on a being so utterly useless and worthless as I feel myself to be."

"When we think of ourselves in relation to God and to the character exhibited by our Saviour," replied Mrs Henderson, "it is altogether proper, as it is entirely true, that we should esteem ourselves unworthy, and feel self-abased before our Maker and our master. But we are taught by that master to judge ourselves and to judge others by the actions of our lives, as we judge of trees by their fruit; and in doing this, we must discriminate between our good and bad actions. We may compare ourselves with others, and when this comparing actions, we must perceive, and it is proper to express candidly, in what we rise above, and in what we sink below others. In this view of ourselves, we may with gratitude to God rejoice that, in some instances, we have been enabled to follow the example of Jesus Christ, and trust, that our endeavors to do so, may be accepted in all cases. At the same time, we ought to search our hearts, and if in anything they are not right before God, preferring their own will to His, we should acknowledge it, and humble ourselves accordingly. But even in the deepest devotion, we should be under the

guidance of reason, and not abandon ourselves to emotions, however pious they may be."

"I do not think it right to abandon ourselves to feeling," said Mr Henderson, "nor do I ever allow myself to do it. Emotions will come; doubts will present themselves. I can command my feelings as well, I believe, as most people; but I can do it only by turning my mind forcibly from what affects me, and engaging it in a different train of thought. I can restore peace in no other way."

"I never found that method effectual with my feelings," said Mrs Henderson, "it only shuts out the tide, till accident breaks down the barrier, and then the torrent is overpowering."

Mr Henderson answered, "If I attempt to reconcile my feelings to painful events, instead of banishing those feelings, I am immediately overpowered by the multitude of distressing doubts which present themselves, and which I can neither quiet nor remove."

"There is only one resource in such difficulties," said Mrs Henderson, "and that appears to me always effectual, whether the faith is weak or powerful. At least I have found it so, in every period of my life and under all circumstances."

"You mean the power of religion, I suppose," said her husband; "but, as I told you before, with me it is not sufficient; my faith is not strong enough, it is not implicit enough to answer the purpose."

"No," interrupted Mrs Henderson, "I did not intend to advert to the general influence of religion; but to the power of one act of christian faith. It is prayer only, that I should think effectual in relieving our minds of such thoughts as afflict you. Prayer is the

greatest privilege of a Christian; the highest, the holiest, the noblest employment of men. It is almost the most natural of all acts. When the mind is deeply wounded and perplexed, when we are pressed on every side, and can find no hope of relief from any quarter where human reason directs us, the very despair we feel prompts us to raise our thoughts to some power above ourselves, and to implore relief. In perfect conformity to this opinion is the anecdote of the Indian woman, who, seeing her child sinking in the wave where no human power could reach him, extended her arms in an agony of despair, and falling on her knees, exclaimed, 'O, THOU EVERYWHERE, save my child.' This was instinct, and in perfect unison with this instinct are the precepts of our Saviour. Nature and faith direct the uncorrupted mind, in every extremity, to ask of God that help, which no other power can afford."

"All that would be very well," replied Mr Henderson, "if, when we ask for relief, we could be always sure of receiving it. We should then be so much encouraged as to resort to this remedy in every evil. But the truth is, that however earnestly we implore, relief is often denied us, and therefore we naturally doubt the efficacy of prayer."

"Oh no, my dear," exclaimed Mrs Henderson, "it is not so. I am sure you cannot believe that a sincere and ardent prayer was ever offered in vain."

"I do not know what you mean," replied Mr Henderson, surprised in his turn. "Did we not daily pray that the life of our dear child might be spared? did we not have our minister to pray for us? did we not seek this blessing with many tears, and with the most pious and humble state of mind? and were not our prayers disregarded, and our precious child taken from us?"

"Will you let me express in my own language the state of our minds, and the object of our prayers, and the dealings of God with us, in this case?" asked Mrs Henderson.

"Do so, my love," replied her husband; "I should be glad to receive light from your way of viewing it."

"You say," observed Mrs Henderson, "that we offered our prayers in the most pious and humble state of mind. If so, we certainly believed that God, who knows all things, could see better than we could what events would really prove a blessing to us, and what would not; and we should pray conditionally, that he would grant what we asked, if he could see it would prove for our happiness. And, as he has ordered things otherwise, our piety and humility require us to submit with resignation to the refusal of our petitions."

"Very well," interrupted Mr Henderson, "allow it to be as you say. Still my assertion remains uncontroverted, that we ask, and are denied. If we prayed not at all, in what should we be losers?"

"I do not view the subject in the same light," replied Mrs Henderson. "I still believe that our prayers are accepted, and answered, if we really pray with sincere and humble minds."

"I do not see how you make it out," said Mr Henderson.

"I can only speak for myself," Mrs Henderson said. "I feel convinced that my petitions are heard, and are accepted, and my prayer granted, if not exactly in the way my own imperfect views would have induced me to dictate, had a choice been allowed me, yet so as to fill my heart with gratitude and resignation."

"How is it, then, we differ so essentially," inquired Mr Henderson, "seeing we are both professors of the religion of Jesus Christ? Both were piously offering prayers for the life of our child, both equally distressed by the fear of losing her; how is it we feel so differently? Tell me the whole process in yourself, and let us compare the state of our feelings and our conduct, step by step, and see, if we can, where the difference lies."

"For my own part," replied his wife, "I never feel disposed to pray, unconditionally, for any outward circumstance. I pray conditionally for temporal blessings, but I plead urgently, that I may be blessed with that spirit which will unite me to my Maker, that I may have the spirit of Christ, and be enabled to view all my temporal circumstances as ordered in infinite mercy. In short, I pray not for external, but internal changes; that my mind may be conformed altogether to the will of God. I pray, also, for all those that are dear to me, that each one may be filled with the spirit of meekness, of wisdom, of love, of goodness, so that we may all go on our way rejoicing, let that way be chequered as it will. For everything else, my dear husband, I pray only in humble submission to the wisdom and goodness of God, not daring to wish that my imperfect mind shall in anything dictate what events shall happen to me."

"What, then!" exclaimed Mr Henderson, "did you not pray earnestly and devoutly for the life of our dear Elizabeth?"

"I did not pray for it unconditionally," replied Mrs Henderson. "I dared not manifest so much presumption. I did pray, if God could see it for the best good of all concerned, that he would grant her to our prayers; but I was afraid to ask more. Even Jesus Christ

did not, in the greatest extremity, offer a prayer for deliverance on any other ground. 'Not my will,' said he, 'but thine be done.' I prayed also, and with deep earnestness, that our minds might be prepared for whatever events should be ordered by his goodness; and that, under any circumstances, we might each of us be supported by his spirit, and receive his healing mercy.

My prayers, I am sure, were heard and granted; and though God has called us to mourn, we ought also to acknowledge and be grateful for the grace he has given us."

"What do you mean by the grace of God?" asked Mr Henderson; "this is a phrase very commonly used, but I never could exactly comprehend its meaning."

"Grace, my dear husband, does it not mean favor?" asked Mrs Henderson, a little embarrassed.

"I do not know," replied her husband, "I am no scholar; nor am I learned in theology."

"Nor do I pretend to be learned in anything," said Mrs Henderson; "but I think grace means any of God's blessings. It is by God's grace we live, and are provided with the comforts and conveniences of life; it is by his grace we have the enjoyment of rational faculties and bodily powers. But generally, when God's grace is spoken of, I suppose his spiritual favors are intended to be expressed."

"Well, and what do you call the spiritual favors of God?" asked Mr Henderson. After a moment's pause, during which Mrs Henderson seemed deep in thought, she replied, "If I find my mind, on any occurrence, greatly disturbed, my spirits depressed, my feelings excited, and some deeply painful impressions made upon me by particular circumstances, and if, in this state, my

religious principles and reflections, though they satisfy my understanding, are unequal to restoring the tranquillity of my feelings; if my philosophy is insufficient, and all common aid fails me, I have then two methods left, which may bring back my peace. If I were not a Christian, even on the ground of philosophy, I might presume, as it is one of its principles that nothing violent can last long, that when time has been allowed its influence, I shall recover the cheerful tone of my feelings. Or, being a Christian, on the ground of religion, I may hope, that God will do for me what I cannot do for myself, if I earnestly implore his mercy to calm the tumult of my emotions. The assistance I receive, the serenity and peace which are restored, is the answer to my prayer. This is the grace of God, his spiritual favor; it is that unseen, and often unknown operation of his power, that preserves the human mind, through all the vicissitudes of life, so capable of happiness; and when it is under the habitual influence of religion, renders it so uniformly peaceful and contented."

"Will you pretend to say," asked Mr Henderson, "that a miracle is performed, in favor of those who pray in the manner and circumstances you describe? and that peace and happiness are restored to their minds by the immediate operation of God's spirit, and not by strictly natural means? This is a fallacy, to which I can never yield my mind. I am not enthusiast enough to believe this."

"My dear husband," replied his wife, "it is not my mind, but yours, which is imposed upon by fallacy. The terms, natural means, and miracles, are both used so indefinitely, they are so obscure and vague, that they are altogether fallacious in their common application. If,

in the case we are speaking of, you intend to express by the term, — 'strictly natural means,' — the mode in which the human mind is always affected in similar circumstances, I will assert that the operation of divine grace in thus producing a desirable state of feeling, when thus earnestly prayed for, is nothing more or less than strictly natural means. For I fully believe that every sincere prayer offered to God for a proper temper of mind, is followed by the temper of mind desired; and yet I do as fully believe the state of feeling would not have been produced, without the ardent desire and humble petition. Prayer is the appointed means of obtaining the blessing, the condition on which it is promised; and when all these circumstances occur, the effect always follows. Thus it may be called strictly natural means. I do not know any means that separates the mind from the influence of Deity. Nature is only another name to express the common Providence of God; and this effect on the mind through the means of prayer I consider of that kind."

Mr Henderson then said, "if you call such an effect of prayer, the operation of natural causes, what do you think produces the effect you call philosophical? Is not that also the operation of natural causes? and if so, what is the difference between them?"

"My dear husband," said Mrs Henderson, "does not God preserve and bless us, when we do not ask him? when we even forget him, and disobey him? He invites us to turn to him and find happiness, by all the variety of events in which his Providence places us. If a painful event induces us to seek him, and ask his gracious influence, we receive it, and our peace is restored. If we do not seek him, he gradually restores our peaceful

state of mind, but not such peace as prayer brings; and thus prepares us for new incitements. All the train of human events, and all the states of mind resulting from them, are only the varied means used by our Heavenly Father to draw our hearts to him, and conform our spirits entirely to him; by which eternal happiness will be secured to us."

"Then," interrupted Mr Henderson, "you mean to say that what is called the philosophical cause, is, in your opinion, only the operation of God on the mind, without any voluntary cooperation of that mind; and what is called spiritual influences, is God's operation on the mind, in cooperation with the earnest and expressed desires of the heart?"

"Yes, that is what I think, my dear," replied his wife; "and I should like to explain my ideas more at large, if you think them worth attending to."

Mr Henderson made no reply, but appeared to listen Mrs Henderson continued. "With those persons who never seek the aid of God's grace, who know nothing of religious intercourse with their Maker, God deals in a certain manner, and such as he perceives to be the most effectual in bringing them to the state of mind most conformed to his own, and therefore most capable of rendering them happy. This being the case with the greatest number of human beings, embracing barbarians, semicivilized people, heathens, infidels, idiots, insane persons, and little children, the methods pursued respecting them are the most frequently observable; so that they who take notice and reason on the circumstances of human life, come at length to the conclusion, that God has established certain general laws, by which he chooses to govern the world, which they call laws of nature, or philosophi-

cal causes; as if God had delegated to other powers, the conduct of those circumstances, which require constant attention and superintendency, while he reserves for himself only the management of those few and extraordinary events, which he deems more important, and requiring greater exertion of divine power. But it is easy to perceive that this mode of reasoning is the effect of man's imperfect faculties, which, not comprehending an idea of Deity, are disposed to circumscribe the attributes of God by their own narrow views."

"This view of the subject seems rational," observed Mr Henderson.

Mrs Henderson continued. "God deals differently with the class of persons, who come into nearer communication with him by means of religion. They are drawn, by their lively faith in divine revelation, to seek the favor of their Heavenly Father directly. They know, they feel, that they are led by his spirit, whenever they do not resist it; and they desire to become more and more conformed to it, and to live by it. They know that they shall be heard by their Maker, whenever they sincerely ask for his assistance and influence. They are convinced they shall be permanently united to God, if they strive to subdue the evil passions and abandon the conduct, which separate them from him, and are truly and earnestly desirous that he should reign in their hearts. To all such persons, and in all their circumstances, God uniformly grants his grace, according to his own divine measure and wisdom; and still, as with mankind at large, effects follow causes, uniformly and constantly; and the reward of spiritual favor, on the urgent request for it, is as much a general mode of operation, as that adopted for the greater number. It is less

frequent, only because fewer minds are in the state to ask and receive. It is therefore, strictly speaking, as much a natural law as the other."

"I like that explanation," said Mr Henderson.

Mrs Henderson's countenance became irradiated, as her husband's mind appeared impressed. She continued. "There are other situations and circumstances of the mind, in which a different mode of operation is adopted by God. In this method, God sees fit to manifest himself sensibly to his creatures, either on their minds immediately, or by interrupting his general course. These circumstances, occurring much less frequently than either of the others I have noticed, and indeed, since the christian era, having apparently not occurred at all, are considered by mankind as the only instances of God's directly operating on worldly affairs; and accordingly they are distinctly called miraculous. But if such phenomena should always occur in the same given situation of men, they would be considered as means as strictly natural, as any other mode that God uses to effect his purposes."

"If what are called natural means, and what are called divine interpositions, and what is called miracle, are all equally the methods uniformly pursued by God to reform and elevate the human character, and unite the spirit of man with his Maker, why is it that such different terms have obtained such general use? I wish you to recapitulate a little on this subject," said Mr Henderson.

Mrs Henderson replied. "The different states of the human mind, which God always regards in his dealings with us, require these different methods, to produce the same result, — which is union with him and

consequent happiness. These different methods are noticed by us, while the causes for them are disregarded. Mankind are prone to look out of themselves for a cause, and are too inattentive to the similar states of mind, which are followed by similar providences; and hence the erroneous ideas of the different modes of operation, which are considered arbitrary in cases of providential interference and of miracle, while his ordinary dealings are supposed to be by established laws, which, when once arranged, are afterwards abandoned by him to their own consequences. The different phraseology is necessary to distinguish the different methods; and if the terms were used only to designate the different states of mind and circumstances of mankind, there would be no false notions imbibed."

"This is a different view of the subject from any I have ever before taken," said Mr Henderson; "and certainly it is more consistent with the character of God, than to suppose, as I have hitherto done, that in all the common concerns of life he holds himself at a distance, and is unconcerned how the world is going on; and that it is only on great occasions, and in uncommon circumstances, that he condescends to interfere with the established order of things. In the view you have given, God is intimately acquainted with every event of every individual, even to his smallest emotion, as well as with his general state of feeling; and he adapts every circumstance to the exact state of mind of each individual, at all times, and in such a manner, as on the whole to be productive of the greatest benefit to each one of his creatures. I have never before taken such a view of our relation to God."

After a short pause, he added in a pensive tone, "I am afraid I have never prayed as I ought."

"How have you prayed, my dear husband?" asked his wife. "You have always been sincere in your prayers, have you not?"

"Yes," replied Mr Henderson, "I have not been hypocritical certainly. I have prayed sincerely, as an act of devotion to God; believing it a duty to acknowledge mercies received, to praise my Maker, to confess my sins and ask forgiveness. But I never felt it a privilege, a delight, the highest honor, to be allowed to disclose my feelings to my God, as really and truly my best friend. I have never asked divine aid and direction, with a full and entire conviction, that I was addressing a Being present with me, and able and willing to grant me every blessing proper for me; and especially, I have never for a moment imagined I must ask him to influence my feelings and my mind, so as to produce the state which will be most agreeable to him, and most happy for myself. I never before conceived this to be the object of prayer. I have never felt it as I ought. But, I confess, my views are changed. The ways of Providence seem lighted up anew. I perceive grounds of resignation in view of our dear Elizabeth's death, which were concealed from me. My faith in God, as the infinitely kind Father of his children, has gained new strength. Never did my relation to this gracious Being seem so near and intimate as it does at this moment. Devotion will henceforward have delight for me, that I have not before been able to derive from it. You remember the beautiful hymn on SEASONS OF PRAYER, in the Christian Examiner, which you have often repeated to me? It breathes a spirit in perfect unison with my present feelings."

SEASONS OF PRAYER.

To prayer, to prayer; — for the morning breaks,
And earth in her Maker's smile awakes.
His light is on all below and above,
The light of gladness and life and love.
Oh, then, on the breath of this early air,
Send upward the incense of grateful prayer.

To prayer; — for the glorious sun is gone,
And the gathering darkness of night comes on,
Like a curtain from God's kind hand it flows,
To shade the couch where his children repose.
Then kneel, while the watching stars are bright,
And give your last thoughts to the Guardian of night.

To prayer; — for the day that God has blest
Comes tranquilly on with its welcome rest.
It speaks of creation's early bloom;
It speaks of the Prince who burst the tomb.
Then summon the spirit's exalted powers,
And devote to Heaven the hallowed hours.

There are smiles and tears in the mother's eyes,
For her new born infant beside her lies.
Oh hour of bliss! when the heart o'erflows
With rapture a mother only knows.
Let it gush forth in words of fervent prayer;
Let it swell up to Heaven for her precious care.

There are smiles and tears in that gathering band,
Where the heart is pledged with the trembling hand.
What trying thoughts in her bosom swell,
As the bride bids parent and home farewell!
Kneel down by the side of the tearful fair,
And strengthen the perilous hour with prayer.

Kneel down by the dying sinner's side,
And pray for his soul through him who died.
Large drops of anguish are thick on his brow;
Oh what is earth and its pleasures now?
And what shall assuage his dark despair,
But the penitent cry of humble prayer?

Kneel down at the couch of departing faith,
And hear the last words the believer saith.
He has bidden adieu to his earthly friends;
There is peace in his eye, that upward bends;
There is peace in his calm, confiding air;
For his last thoughts are God's, his last words prayer.

The voice of prayer at the sable bier!
A voice to sustain, to soothe, and to cheer.
It commends the spirit to God who gave;
It lifts the thoughts from the cold, dark grave;
It points to the glory, where he shall reign,
Who whisper'd "Thy brother shall rise again."

The voice of prayer in the world of bliss!
But gladder, purer, than rose from this.
The ransomed shout to their glorious King,
Where no sorrow shades the soul as they sing;
But a sinless and joyous song they raise,
And their voice of prayer is eternal praise.

Awake, awake, and gird up thy strength,
To join that holy band at length.
To him who unceasing love displays,
Whom the powers of nature unceasingly praise,
To him thy heart and thy hours be given;
For a life of prayer is a life of heaven.

1st Series. No. 13.

A

DISCOURSE

ON

BEING BORN AGAIN.

BY MRS. BARBAULD.

THIRD EDITION.

PRINTED FOR THE

American Unitarian Association.

BOSTON,

GRAY AND BOWEN, 141 WASHINGTON STREET.

1832.

Price 2 Cents.

DISCOURSE.

'Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

A STRANGE paradox this, and so it seemed to the person to whom the declaration was addressed, and he answered to the literal sense, with more simplicity than acuteness, 'Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Yet the eastern manner is so full of bold metaphors, that though a European might naturally have been startled at the seeming uncouthness of the figure, a ruler in Israel ought to have readily understood the spiritual meaning shadowed out under the similitude. The beginning of a Christian's life in his conversion from sin to holiness is here designed under the figure of a birth, a new or a second birth; and it shall be the business of this discourse to unfold the beauty and justness of the metaphor.

That the whole man is not born at once, is a doctrine of philosophy no less than of religion; the infant has only entered upon an animal life; whatever lofty titles we may salute him with on his entrance upon the stage, he is not yet a moral agent, or even a rational creature. There is, therefore, some subsequent period in which he enters upon the spiritual, the divine life, and whether it be by the gradual unfolding of his powers, or by the more sudden and striking change of a conversion from sin to

holiness, it is well expressed by the figure of a birth.

What is it to be born in the natural sense? To be born is to receive being, life, existence. It is to have objects presented to our eyes, melodies to our ears, flavors to our taste, to have a thousand sensations crowded upon us, of which, before, we could not possibly have any idea, or form the most imperfect conception. It is to leave a dark prison, and emerge to life, and joy, and action. And how well does the change wrought in the heart of a Christian correspond with this criterion of a birth! What a new world of ideas and feelings are opened upon him! He had before no organs with which to discern spiritual things. He had heard of them, but he apprehended them not; there was no faculty in him by which he could take hold of them; but the moment he is born again the eyes of his mind are opened; he sees, feels, tastes, and relishes the word of God, the bread of life, the gracious influences of the Spirit. The invisible world is laid open to him, he sees the beauty of right action, feels the force of moral obligation. He tastes a sweetness in the ordinances of religion, in prayers and psalms and sacraments, which before were dry and without savor to him; which he had attended from day to day and from sabbath to sabbath, as mere matter of form and decency. Before he was born into the world of sense, now he holds communion with the world of spirits. And is not this a mighty and important change?

Again: to be born implies having a father, a descent, a parentage; the natural man is born the son, perhaps, of some mighty chief or distinguished statesman, or head of a noble house. But trifling, indeed, are all these distinctions in comparison of that which *he* receives who acquires a right to consider himself as the child of God, who in humble confidence may call by the tender and

affectionate appellation of Father, the Sovereign of the universe. A child, when born, has a name given him. And the Christian has a name, a new name, written in his forehead, registered in heaven, even in the Lamb's book of life. As soon as a child comes into the world its voice is heard. It sends forth a cry, a meaning cry, which seems to say, 'Here am I, feeble, helpless, naked; nourish me, protect me, cherish me in your bosom, bear with my weakness, lead me up to manhood.' So also, when a believer is born into the life of Christ, his voice is heard and he prayeth. With strong and earnest cries he supplicates the Father of his spirit for pardon and for blessings. Prayer is the natural, unstudied expression of those feelings which are then awakened within him. He casts himself before the throne of grace, and waits patiently there as an infant clings to the breast of his mother, and there he rests all his cares, all his concerns in a childlike humility and unreserved trust and cheerful confidence.

Again: A child is not born into the world without great and strong pains. And great are the pains which precede the new birth, sharp are the pangs of repentance, great the travail of the ministers and laborers in Christ, and deep those groanings which cannot be uttered, that must pass before the change be wrought, which in some distinguished instances has been wrought from the depths of guilt and defilement, and mental bondage to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. But when once a child is born, how great is the joy! The father taketh it in his arms and blesseth it; the mother forgetteth her suffering to smile upon it; the friends and relations and neighbors crowd around it, and welcome into existence the new creature. It is received into a family, into a brotherhood, linked into a close knot of amity with all who are partakers of the same blood. With

mingled curiosity and affection they trace in its little lineaments lines of resemblance to its parents, and fondly prognosticate from thence the beauty and vigor of the future man. And is there not joy when a soul is born! joy of its ministers, joy of the church, joy even in heaven over a sinner that repenteth! With what kindly meltings of paternal love does the universal Father receive the returning prodigal, revive the spirits of the penitent Magdalen, and cherish the innocent children who come to him for a blessing! And what a family, what a brotherhood, does *he* become a member of who is partaker of this divine life! the wide extended family of God's virtuous and approved children; the brotherhood of all the holy and the happy in all worlds and in all ages; he is united to saints and angels, and spirits of the just made perfect, who do not disdain the meanest member of this blessed community, if united with them in sincere desire to do the will of their common Father.

Again: What further joy is there if the child be born an heir, and entitled to inherit some portion of this vain and perishable earth! What ostentation, what importance, what carefulness in displaying the wealth, in setting forth and adorning the child! The very nurse is quite proud and glories to take care of one born to such a distinguished and happy lot. The possessions of most are confined to a certain number of acres, but some favored mortals enjoy a portion of this globe which may even be distinguished in a map of the world, and extends over the circumference of a few inches there. How assiduous to give him his title, how careful to preserve his pedigree! What a lively interest is taken in his health, his dress, his sports, and everything belonging to him, as if he were really of a distinct species from the common race of mortals! And to what an estate, what a title,

what a heritage is the Christian born! He is born an heir of glory, he expects a heritage in the land of promise, thrones in heaven; heaven is his, and earth is his, and all things are his, for God is his; and nothing can deprive him of his glorious birthright, except he himself should alienate and renounce it. — But let it be observed, the heir does not inherit immediately. He waits for his possessions till he is able to enjoy and manage them, and in the meantime this inheritor of a splendid fortune is made subject to every one that is about him. First he cannot, and then he may not, stir a step without others; he is everything in hope, nothing in possession; his cheeks are bathed in frequent tears, his will is crossed, his appetites checked, the purposes and projects of his little heart continually counteracted; he is scourged, buffeted and severely handled, according to his childish conceptions, by his parents, masters, and tutors. Nay, he is kept under by those who afterwards will not presume so much as to approach his presence. And thus it must be with the heir of glory while he is in the nonage of this world; afflictions and crosses and disappointments are the schoolmasters to bring him to Christ. His high destination and lofty hopes do not hinder him from being lorded over and roughly treated by the children of this world, who are often wiser in their generation than the children of light. Jacob was the heir of the promises, yet he became the servant of Laban; and the seed of Abraham was long held in bondage by the Egyptians.

In the next place it may be remarked, that though the child is born, it may die. Life, *mere* life, is an inestimable gift, and there is an infinite difference between existence in the lowest state and non-existence; but life in its early stages is peculiarly frail and delicate; when the flame is first kindled, a breath will extinguish it. What care, therefore, is exercised to preserve the tender infant,

to choose the most wholesome air and salutary food, to avoid infectious disorders, and cherish its limbs with grateful warmth, and promote by frequent exercise the expansion of its powers! What anxiety, if it appears to decline, instead of thriving in health and vigor! What expense or what trouble is spared to procure the most judicious advice, and find out the cause and apply the remedy? And shall we feel less care or less anxiety to preserve the life and well-being of the soul? Is not equal care requisite in the beginnings of the spiritual life to prevent the smoking flax from being quenched, and the languishing virtue from becoming extinct? Can our virtues gain strength without exercise, or spiritual beings thrive without spiritual food? Is the young Christian able to contend with the subtle cavils of sophistry, or to resist the contagion of evil example? Can he breathe freely in the tainted atmosphere of impure communication; and will his virtues have the same genuine and healthy complexion in the world, as when protected and cherished in the shade of domestic retirement?

Examine yourselves, therefore, all you who are concerned for the well-being of the immortal part within you, both whether you have undergone this important change, and whether you are improving it to the perfection of the divine life. As to the first part of the question, much needless anxiety has formerly been incurred by weak and well meaning Christians for want of reflecting on this simple truth, that he whom we see *living* must some time or other certainly have been *born*. When we see a man walking, conversing, acting, exercising all the functions of animal life, we should think it very superfluous to inquire whether he had been born or no. Thus no other criterion is necessary to ascertain the reality of the new birth but the effects of it. When we see a man in whom holy affections and good principles bring forth the fruits of vir-

tuous actions, we may be well assured that he is born in the gospel sense, though he may remember it as little as he does his natural birth. The operations of grace are gradual as well as those of nature; the widest flame is kindled at first by the smallest spark, and whatever is produced must be brought to perfection by slow and insensible degrees. Therefore, first, be not satisfied with merely being born. It is not enough that the child is born, it must grow too. Do you grow in grace and graces? In a healthy body the limbs enlarge and shoot out. A vigorous principle of life draws nourishment from everything it takes; it cannot be stationary; if it does not thrive and increase, it must languish and die. It is not natural to rest in any stage, and especially in the earliest and weakest. We love children rather for the promise than the fruit. Lovely and interesting as they are, if they were to remain children we should be grievously disappointed. If, after having nursed them up to the full age of manhood, they were to retain the weakness and imbecility of an infant, instead of exciting tenderness they would raise disgust. And though the meanest renewed soul is precious in the sight of God, yet we must run and strive, and add to our faith virtue, and to virtue holiness and all the fair fruits of the spirit. Would you know, therefore, whether you are in this healthy and growing state, inquire with yourselves.

Is your taste pure and unvitiated, your appetite for spiritual things strong and vigorous, or can you not relish your sabbaths and your sermons except you meet with wit and eloquence and novelty to tickle the nicer ear? Can you not love your duty unless it sorts with your inclination? Are you various and capricious in your taste for divine things, sometimes longing and sometimes loathing? Can you not hold communion with a good Christian of plain, unadorned sense and homespun manners? Then is

the complexion of your inward man too delicate and weakly. Ye are not only babes in Christ, but sickly babes too.

Is your conscience sensible and tender? It is a bad sign when in the natural man the feeling is numbed and torpid. Conscience is the moral sense or *feeling* everywhere diffused, and tremblingly alive to every impression. Does it continue quick and lively, or is it worn away by the irritation of frequent injuries? Is any part about you palsied and callous? Then, indeed, is your soul's health in an alarming state, and you have great reason to apply to the Physician of souls for a cure.

Do you relish the word of God? I ask not do you *read*, though that were perhaps a question to be asked, but do you *relish* it? Are you revived by its promises, awed by its threats, quickened by its examples? Those who have acquired a taste for the literature of the schools, do as it were suck the sweetness from the poet's spring, and imbibe into their souls the spirit of the classic page. Do you in like manner dwell upon the conversations and the life of your Saviour? Do you cling to them like a bee to the bud, and draw out their genuine flavor and sweetness? Taste of that honey, and, like Jonathan, your eyes shall be enlightened.

Is your sense of invisible things quick and piercing? Where others see trees and suns and harvests, do you see God and Christ and glory? Where others see crosses and afflictions, set as it were in array against them, do you see graces springing and blessings dropping down upon you? Where others see the vain and miserable politics of this world, the fretting, bustling and contention of the children of it, do you see an overruling Providence, directing and ordering all things according to its own wise and beneficent purposes? Do you see God in everything? Is he always intimately present to you in every scene and in every transaction, and nearer to

your heart than any outward connexion? Then is the vital principle strong and vigorous within you.

Lastly, do you live by prayer? Are your prayers forced from you by the strong impulse of nature, when danger or unforeseen distress overtakes you like that of Peter; 'Lord help us or we perish?' Are they formal and stated only, or do you pray without ceasing, — standing, walking, conversing, buying and selling? In the song and in the dance do you lift up your hearts to God? For though the buyers and sellers might not be introduced into the temple, yet the business of the temple may and must be carried on in the commerce of the world.

And if you have the happiness to find after fair examination that you are yourselves thus advanced, make it your business to educate and bring up others to the same state of maturity. Be nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the church of Christ. When you meet with those who are inferior to yourselves in gifts and attainments, do not separate yourselves from them with a pharisaical fastidiousness, but treat them with that tenderness and indulgence, which you would show to a promising infant. Remove out of their path every stumbling block, remembering who it is that hath said, 'Offend not one of these little ones.' Let your superiority be shown in bearing with their weakness, in instructing their ignorance, in rectifying their mistakes, and passing over with a manly indifference the little spirit of captiousness and humor which proceeds from the petulance of their infirm age. Remember, it is not a trifling thing to be born, and despise not the day of small things. Before birth there is nothing; nothing on which to ground a hope, or hardly a wish; but as soon as born, there are the seeds, the rudiments of a human being; they want expanding, it is true, but they are there; they require only kindly warmth and nourishment to spread into the perfect man.

Thus he in whom, by the divine grace, good principles and sincere intentions of doing well are formed, has the root of the matter in him, and needs nothing but the gradual discipline of years and events to bring out and confirm his virtues.

Finally, et us all lend our utmost endeavors to procure an interest in that life to which the being born again is to introduce us. There is a beautiful progression in the powers of man. In the womb he lives a vegetative life, after the natural birth an animal life, after the new birth a spiritual life. Unlike to the grass of the field, which when it withers or is cut down springs up again, it is true, but neither stronger nor fresher, nor less corruptible than before; for, to exist today, and tomorrow to be cast into the oven, completes from generation to generation the short and simple annals of the vegetable race; — unlike to these, he receives with every change a new accession of faculties and enjoyments, and, if it is not his own fault, rises in value after every decay. You, then, who are old, according to the number of years, and have almost spent one life, have you taken care to provide yourselves with another? While the principle of decay is busy within you, and every year takes something from your strength and agility and vigor, and leaves you but the remnant of yourselves, do you feel another nature within you springing and growing, and pushing towards perfection? Or have you nothing which belongs to age but its infirmities? Are you gray with years and green in goodness, withering away in your outward, and scarcely blossoming in your inward man? Or, at best, are your late-born virtues like the unseasonable shoots of autumn, when the fading year has not vigor enough to bring them to perfection? Are you almost pushed out of one class of being, and is scarcely the embryo formed in you of a new being belonging to another class? How, then,

indeed, can you enter into the kingdom of heaven? The bars against your entrance are those of the eternal differences of species, and the immutable nature of things; for you will observe it is not said, He that is not born again *shall* not enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he *cannot* enter. That which is produced a vegetable cannot enter into the mineral kingdom, nor that which is formed a mineral into the animal kingdom: thus, also, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit,' and each class and mode of being must be kept distinct, nor is it possible that the one should enter into the precincts of the other. And this is the case with most of the denunciations in the word of God. They are not arbitrary exclusions from happiness, and punishments contrived and invented (if I may so speak) for the purpose of inflicting misery upon the delinquent; but salutary warnings and kind information respecting the natural and necessary consequences of our actions and dispositions. Nor is the kingdom of heaven separated from the kingdoms of this world, as they are from one another, by barriers of rock and wide extended seas, and jealous gates and fortresses, nor need we go out into the wilderness to find it. It is in the midst of us. It exists silently, to most invisibly, in the very heart and bustle of the world, a kingdom within a kingdom. Its boundaries have nothing in common with those of space or time. They relate to dispositions only. Where these are heavenly, there is the kingdom of heaven; where these are sensual, there is the kingdom of sense. Into the kingdom of sense, indeed, we have all been born, and while we are in this world we ought to belong to it; but the things of sense are transitory; let us, therefore, secure an interest in that spiritual kingdom which never passeth away.

1st Series. No. 14.

ON

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.

BY CONVERS FRANCIS.

SECOND EDITION.

PRINTED FOR THE

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GRAY AND BOWEN, 141 WASHINGTON STREET.
1831.

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ON

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.

One of the many random charges brought against Unitarians at the present day is, that they are no friends to *experimental religion;* that they know nothing about it, and being strangers to it themselves do not seek to promote it in others. It is true, they are not friends to what has sometimes been called experimental religion; for we think this is an expression, which has had the fate to be strangely abused and perverted. Many talk and write about experimental religion, as if it were a mysterious, unintelligible process or possession, the badge to be worn by those few only, who are the special favorites of heaven. They divide the whole world into but two classes, between whom there is a deep and wide gulf of separation, and take no note of the various degrees, more or less imperfect, in which the true spirit of religion may be cherished, and which constitute a very great diversity in the religious characters of men. What they understand by experimental religion seems to be a certain tangible object, which is to be seized or acquired altogether, or else nothing is gained; it is the result of a peculiar call of God, comes from influences entirely

supernatural, and is in fact a sort of miraculous power, which enables them, and them only, to step at once out of darkness into light, to leave what is termed the world, and join what is termed the company of the saints. Hence they sometimes speak of *getting* religion and *losing* religion, as they would speak of getting or losing property, as if it were an outward possession, and not a temper of mind and heart: as if it were a certain point, at which, when they arrive, they are to stop and congratulate themselves on the possession, and not a principle of increase and improvement in piety and holiness, as if it were a kind of charter for heaven, put into their hands they know not how nor whence, and insuring to them by one stirring process the benefits of salvation.

Now these and kindred views we believe to be as contradictory to every correct interpretation of scripture, as they are to the suggestions of the understanding and of reason. But no one, who is acquainted with the subject, will say that, therefore, we believe that there is in reality no such thing as experimental religion. Very far from it. We do believe most firmly in its reality and power. It is an old complaint, that men are governed by words more than by things. Opinions and feelings are so much modified by associated ideas, that people are very apt to look with contempt on what have become favorite expressions with those, whose opinions they deem irrational and unscriptural, even when the expressions themselves may have a true and good meaning. That this incautious association of ideas has led some minds to an indiscriminate and unjustifiable dislike of the phrase *experimental religion*, we do not deny. But it is in itself a very significant and appropriate phrase, and

may be so used as to express none but good and just ideas; nor would we by any means reject it, because it has sometimes been abused by the unskilful or the fanatical.

Experimental religion, of course, signifies religion, the influence of which is and has been experienced; and when we speak of experiencing religion, we use the same language, and in the same sense, as when we speak of experiencing the influence of any principle or emotion, as of love, joy, sorrow, &c. The language is perfectly plain and intelligible in the one case, and there is no reason why it should not be equally plain and intelligible in the other. The word *experimental* is sometimes opposed to *theoretical;* thus we speak of an experimental farmer, meaning thereby one who carries into practice all those rules of good husbandry which he has learned from experience. It is sometimes opposed to a mere *display of words;* as when we say such a man may talk about trouble, but another knows it by experience. And in general, in connexion with whatever subject it may be used, it denotes *personal*, *practical acquaintance* with the subject. Just so it is in religion. When we speak of it as experimental, we understand by it that thorough vital religion, which is planted in the heart, and sanctifies the thoughts, the purposes and the life, and which stands opposed to mere speculation, or mere profession, to idle clamors or boastful words.

I will endeavor to point out what I conceive to be the elements, which enter into the composition of experimental religion, when it is rightly understood, and exhibited in a scriptural, just and solemn form.

1. One requisite to experimental religion is, that we should receive the truths of religion *as realities*; I mean that they should stand forth to the mind, as having a distinct existence, in bright colors, with as much definite certainty, as if they lived and breathed before us. And this is not so common nor so easy as we may suppose it to be. It is without doubt common and easy to give our *assent* to religious truths; but this we may do, and yet those truths may be no *realities* to us. We may assent to them, because the evidence which accompanies them is too strong to be resisted or refuted; but to have them actually present to the mind in the freshness of vivid existence, is quite a different thing. There are certainly many truths which we do not and cannot deny, but which we never realize, — many to which the understanding consents, but which pass across the mental vision like fleeting clouds, whose changing tints die away upon the eye, or like those mists which roll off in dim and shadowy succession, and are forgotten. The arm that is palsied may be as useless as if it were severed from the body; so that belief in religion, which is weakened and neutralized by the want of a distinct and powerful feeling of reality, may be as inefficacious as if it did not exist at all.

Take a few instances, in which each one may appeal to his own consciousness.

We say and we believe, that there is a God, a living Spirit, who formed and who sustains the universe, and who is present in every part of it by his knowledge and agency. But do we realize this great truth? Is it as much an object of constant and unfailing certainty to our minds as the existence of our friends and associates

here on earth? Does it attend us in our meditations and our pursuits, as a truth upon which we act, and which gives a cast and color to our views and purposes? Is it not to be feared, that after all, it is frequently only a formal consent of a mind which sees God in nothing, and nothing in God?—Thus likewise, it is an object of rational belief with us, that God exercises over us a natural and moral government, designed to train us up to holiness and happiness. But let conscience say whether this truth is as much a reality to us, as the civil government of our country under which we live. Are we as habitually and firmly persuaded of the one as of the other? Do the laws of the divine administration present themselves as actually and definitely to our minds, as the laws of the land, by which we are bound to regulate our conduct? Must we not confess, that these truths are something less real to our feelings and conceptions in the one case, than in the other?—Again: it is a point of belief with us, that we are accountable beings, that we are responsible to a high and awful tribunal for our time and our talents, our privileges and means,—that 'we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,'—and that 'every one of us must give account of himself to God.' Now are we prepared to say that this truth is a solemn reality with us? Do we actually feel it to be as much so as our legal and pecuniary obligations to our fellow men? Examine it by this test, and see if the hold which we have on this most momentous truth be not quite too feeble and nominal, if there be not that chilling want of reality, which cripples our faith and robs it of its power.—Once more; we believe in the history of Jesus Christ, of all that he did, and

tuous actions, we may be well assured that he is born in the gospel sense, though he may remember it as little as he does his natural birth. The operations of grace are gradual as well as those of nature; the widest flame is kindled at first by the smallest spark, and whatever is produced must be brought to perfection by slow and insensible degrees. Therefore, first, be not satisfied with merely being born. It is not enough that the child is born, it must grow too. Do you grow in grace and graces? In a healthy body the limbs enlarge and shoot out. A vigorous principle of life draws nourishment from everything it takes; it cannot be stationary; if it does not thrive and increase, it must languish and die. It is not natural to rest in any stage, and especially in the earliest and weakest. We love children rather for the promise than the fruit. Lovely and interesting as they are, if they were to remain children we should be grievously disappointed. If, after having nursed them up to the full age of manhood, they were to retain the weakness and imbecility of an infant, instead of exciting tenderness they would raise disgust. And though the meanest renewed soul is precious in the sight of God, yet we must run and strive, and add to our faith virtue, and to virtue holiness and all the fair fruits of the spirit. Would you know, therefore, whether you are in this healthy and growing state, inquire with yourselves.

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your heart than any outward connexion? Then is the vital principle strong and vigorous within you.

Lastly, do you live by prayer? Are your prayers forced from you by the strong impulse of nature, when danger or unforeseen distress overtakes you like that of Peter; 'Lord help us or we perish?' Are they formal and stated only, or do you pray without ceasing, — standing, walking, conversing, buying and selling? In the song and in the dance do you lift up your hearts to God? For though the buyers and sellers might not be introduced into the temple, yet the business of the temple may and must be carried on in the commerce of the world.

And if you have the happiness to find after fair examination that you are yourselves thus advanced, make it your business to educate and bring up others to the same state of maturity. Be nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the church of Christ. When you meet with those who are inferior to yourselves in gifts and attainments, do not separate yourselves from them with a pharisaical fastidiousness, but treat them with that tenderness and indulgence, which you would show to a promising infant. Remove out of their path every stumbling block, remembering who it is that hath said, 'Offend not one of these little ones.' Let your superiority be shown in bearing with their weakness, in instructing their ignorance, in rectifying their mistakes, and passing over with a manly indifference the little spirit of captiousness and humor which proceeds from the petulance of their infirm age. Remember, it is not a trifling thing to be born, and despise not the day of small things. Before birth there is nothing; nothing on which to ground a hope, or hardly a wish; but as soon as born, there are the seeds, the rudiments of a human being; they want expanding, it is true, but they are there; they require only kindly warmth and nourishment to spread into the perfect man.

Thus he in whom, by the divine grace, good principles and sincere intentions of doing well are formed, has the root of the matter in him, and needs nothing but the gradual discipline of years and events to bring out and confirm his virtues.

Finally, et us all lend our utmost endeavors to procure an interest in that life to which the being born again is to introduce us. There is a beautiful progression in the powers of man. In the womb he lives a vegetative life, after the natural birth an animal life, after the new birth a spiritual life. Unlike to the grass of the field, which when it withers or is cut down springs up again, it is true, but neither stronger nor fresher, nor less corruptible than before; for, to exist today, and tomorrow to be cast into the oven, completes from generation to generation the short and simple annals of the vegetable race; — unlike to these, he receives with every change a new accession of faculties and enjoyments, and, if it is not his own fault, rises in value after every decay. You, then, who are old, according to the number of years, and have almost spent one life, have you taken care to provide yourselves with another? While the principle of decay is busy within you, and every year takes something from your strength and agility and vigor, and leaves you but the remnant of yourselves, do you feel another nature within you springing and growing, and pushing towards perfection? Or have you nothing which belongs to age but its infirmities? Are you gray with years and green in goodness, withering away in your outward, and scarcely blossoming in your inward man? Or, at best, are your late-born virtues like the unseasonable shoots of autumn, when the fading year has not vigor enough to bring them to perfection? Are you almost pushed out of one class of being, and is scarcely the embryo formed in you of a new being belonging to another class? How, then,

indeed, can you enter into the kingdom of heaven? The bars against your entrance are those of the eternal differences of species, and the immutable nature of things; for you will observe it is not said, He that is not born again *shall* not enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he *cannot* enter. That which is produced a vegetable cannot enter into the mineral kingdom, nor that which is formed a mineral into the animal kingdom: thus, also, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit,' and each class and mode of being must be kept distinct, nor is it possible that the one should enter into the precincts of the other. And this is the case with most of the denunciations in the word of God. They are not arbitrary exclusions from happiness, and punishments contrived and invented (if I may so speak) for the purpose of inflicting misery upon the delinquent; but salutary warnings and kind information respecting the natural and necessary consequences of our actions and dispositions. Nor is the kingdom of heaven separated from the kingdoms of this world, as they are from one another, by barriers of rock and wide extended seas, and jealous gates and fortresses, nor need we go out into the wilderness to find it. It is in the midst of us. It exists silently, to most invisibly, in the very heart and bustle of the world, a kingdom within a kingdom. Its boundaries have nothing in common with those of space or time. They relate to dispositions only. Where these are heavenly, there is the kingdom of heaven; where these are sensual, there is the kingdom of sense. Into the kingdom of sense, indeed, we have all been born, and while we are in this world we ought to belong to it; but the things of sense are transitory; let us, therefore, secure an interest in that spiritual kingdom which never passeth away.

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ON

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.

BY CONVERS FRANCIS.

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ON

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.

One of the many random charges brought against Unitarians at the present day is, that they are no friends to *experimental religion;* that they know nothing about it, and being strangers to it themselves do not seek to promote it in others. It is true, they are not friends to what has sometimes been called experimental religion; for we think this is an expression, which has had the fate to be strangely abused and perverted. Many talk and write about experimental religion, as if it were a mysterious, unintelligible process or possession, the badge to be worn by those few only, who are the special favorites of heaven. They divide the whole world into but two classes, between whom there is a deep and wide gulf of separation, and take no note of the various degrees, more or less imperfect, in which the true spirit of religion may be cherished, and which constitute a very great diversity in the religious characters of men. What they understand by experimental religion seems to be a certain tangible object, which is to be seized or acquired altogether, or else nothing is gained; it is the result of a peculiar call of God, comes from influences entirely

supernatural, and is in fact a sort of miraculous power, which enables them, and them only, to step at once out of darkness into light, to leave what is termed the world, and join what is termed the company of the saints. Hence they sometimes speak of *getting* religion and *losing* religion, as they would speak of getting or losing property, as if it were an outward possession, and not a temper of mind and heart: as if it were a certain point, at which, when they arrive, they are to stop and congratulate themselves on the possession, and not a principle of increase and improvement in piety and holiness; as if it were a kind of charter for heaven, put into their hands they know not how nor whence, and insuring to them by one stirring process the benefits of salvation.

Now these and kindred views we believe to be as contradictory to every correct interpretation of scripture, as they are to the suggestions of the understanding and of reason. But no one, who is acquainted with the subject, will say that, therefore, we believe that there is in reality no such thing as experimental religion. Very far from it. We do believe most firmly in its reality and power. It is an old complaint, that men are governed by words more than by things. Opinions and feelings are so much modified by associated ideas, that people are very apt to look with contempt on what have become favorite expressions with those, whose opinions they deem irrational and unscriptural, even when the expressions themselves may have a true and good meaning. That this incautious association of ideas has led some minds to an indiscriminate and unjustifiable dislike of the phrase *experimental religion*, we do not deny. But it is in itself a very significant and appropriate phrase, and

may be so used as to express none but good and just ideas; nor would we by any means reject it, because it has sometimes been abused by the unskilful or the fanatical.

Experimental religion, of course, signifies religion, the influence of which is and has been experienced; and when we speak of experiencing religion, we use the same language, and in the same sense, as when we speak of experiencing the influence of any principle or emotion, as of love, joy, sorrow, &c. The language is perfectly plain and intelligible in the one case, and there is no reason why it should not be equally plain and intelligible in the other. The word *experimental* is sometimes opposed to *theoretical;* thus we speak of an experimental farmer, meaning thereby one who carries into practice all those rules of good husbandry which he has learned from experience. It is sometimes opposed to a mere *display of words;* as when we say such a man may talk about trouble, but another knows it by experience. And in general, in connexion with whatever subject it may be used, it denotes *personal, practical acquaintance* with the subject. Just so it is in religion. When we speak of it as experimental, we understand by it that thorough vital religion, which is planted in the heart, and sanctifies the thoughts, the purposes and the life, and which stands opposed to mere speculation, or mere profession, to idle clamors or boastful words.

I will endeavor to point out what I conceive to be the elements, which enter into the composition of experimental religion, when it is rightly understood, and exhibited in a scriptural, just and solemn form.

1. One requisite to experimental religion is, that we should receive the truths of religion *as realities;* I mean that they should stand forth to the mind, as having a distinct existence, in bright colors, with as much definite certainty, as if they lived and breathed before us. And this is not so common nor so easy as we may suppose it to be. It is without doubt common and easy to give our *assent* to religious truths; but this we may do, and yet those truths may be no *realities* to us. We may assent to them, because the evidence which accompanies them is too strong to be resisted or refuted; but to have them actually present to the mind in the freshness of vivid existence, is quite a different thing. There are certainly many truths which we do not and cannot deny, but which we never realize, — many to which the understanding consents, but which pass across the mental vision like fleeting clouds, whose changing tints die away upon the eye, or like those mists which roll off in dim and shadowy succession, and are forgotten. The arm that is palsied may be as useless as if it were severed from the body; so that belief in religion, which is weakened and neutralized by the want of a distinct and powerful feeling of reality, may be as inefficacious as if it did not exist at all.

Take a few instances, in which each one may appeal to his own consciousness.

We say and we believe, that there is a God, a living Spirit, who formed and who sustains the universe, and who is present in every part of it by his knowledge and agency. But do we realize this great truth? Is it as much an object of constant and unfailing certainty to our minds as the existence of our friends and associates

here on earth? Does it attend us in our meditations and our pursuits, as a truth upon which we act, and which gives a cast and color to our views and purposes? Is it not to be feared, that after all, it is frequently only a formal consent of a mind which sees God in nothing, and nothing in God?—Thus likewise, it is an object of rational belief with us, that God exercises over us a natural and moral government, designed to train us up to holiness and happiness. But let conscience say whether this truth is as much a reality to us, as the civil government of our country under which we live. Are we as habitually and firmly persuaded of the one as of the other? Do the laws of the divine administration present themselves as actually and definitely to our minds, as the laws of the land, by which we are bound to regulate our conduct? Must we not confess, that these truths are something less real to our feelings and conceptions in the one case, than in the other?—Again: it is a point of belief with us, that we are accountable beings, that we are responsible to a high and awful tribunal for our time and our talents, our privileges and means,—that 'we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,'—and that 'every one of us must give account of himself to God.' Now are we prepared to say that this truth is a solemn reality with us? Do we actually feel it to be as much so as our legal and pecuniary obligations to our fellow men? Examine it by this test, and see if the hold which we have on this most momentous truth be not quite too feeble and nominal, if there be not that chilling want of reality, which cripples our faith and robs it of its power.—Once more; we believe in the history of Jesus Christ, of all that he did, and

taught and suffered for the salvation of man. But let us put the question to our hearts, — have we a realizing sense of what we owe to this heavenly Benefactor? Have we as keen and vivid a feeling of the services and love of the blessed Saviour, as we have of the poor, short-lived kindness of our earthly friends? Alas! for us, that God should in the gospel reach forth the arm of his mercy to lift us up and bless us, and yet that we should look upon it with cold indifference.

I have mentioned these merely as instances of the state of mind, to which I have alluded, — a state of lethargy and deadness with regard to the *reality* of religion. Men believe or profess to believe what you teach them of the great truths, which relate to eternity; but they do not realize them, — they do not suffer them to be wrought into the whole texture of their thoughts and feelings, as they do with respect to those truths which prompt and regulate their mechanical, agricultural or mercantile pursuits.— Now it is manifest, that while they remain in such a state, they can have nothing which deserves the name of experimental religion. On such a soil, at the best, nothing but stinted shrubbery and half-formed fruits can ever grow. If we would experience the power of Christianity, we must love it; and how can we love it, if we do not realize it? There must be a strong, vital feeling, that the great and essential principles of religion are as true as that the sun shines upon us; or else, 'the kingdom of God' will be to us not 'in power,' but 'in word' only. This persuasion must lie at the foundation of all experimental holiness of heart.

I know that the sense of the reality of the great truths relating to God, to his moral government, to our accountableness, and to the solemnities of a future state, may,

in a peculiar state of mental weakness or in the excitement of passion, operate so blindly, and with such painful intenseness, as to produce nothing but anguish or dismay of spirit; and this distressing perversion of a good thing may induce us to dread being in earnest about religion. But, we should remember there is as much difference between a solemn and affecting sense of the actual truth of religion, and that agonizing feeling which crushes the heart, as there is between health and sickness, between a pure atmosphere and pestilent vapors. Lay it down for a first principle, that there must be something more than a faint, nominal, misty and loose belief in the great doctrines of Christianity, if we would have them come upon our souls in their power and purity, — that, in short, there can be no such thing as experimental religion, without a deep and earnest feeling of the *reality* of its truths and principles.

2. Another essential requisite to experimental religion, is a sense of *personal interest* in the subject. It is not enough to believe in the truths of the Gospel; it is not enough even to have a deep feeling of their reality. We must go further; we must appropriate them personally to ourselves, to our own warning, our own improvement, and our own encouragement. This is an indispensable step in the process, by which the power of Christianity is brought into the heart and enthroned there. No man ever experienced religion, in any rational sense, who did not consider its great and solemn truths as applicable to himself, to his own peculiar moral condition, his own spiritual wants, his sorrows, his temptations, and his sins. It is very easy to be loud in the praises of Christianity, to bestow upon it splendid and eloquent applause, to think and speak of it as a glorious and beautiful dispen-

sation, to tell how it stimulates and fills the vast spiritual desires of the human breast, how it relieves every want, and brightens all despondency; to be wrapt into admiration at the light which it sheds on eternity, at the everlasting hopes which it holds out to the aspirations of man, at the dignity and elevation which it imparts to the affections of our nature that cleave to immortality: it is, I say, very easy to think and talk in this glowing strain, and yet have no feeling of a personal interest in this most blessed gift of God to man. We may consider it in every point of view, except that in which it touches *our* hearts, and addresses itself to *our* souls. We may regard it as that, in which mankind in general have an interest, but in which *we* have no peculiar interest. Thus we may please ourselves with a sort of romantic warmth about it, and forget meanwhile that its vital power has never gone down into our hearts.

Now this general, vague, superficial way of thinking and feeling will never be sufficient to make religion a matter of experimental acquaintance to the heart of the individual. It is certainly important to have and to cherish these large and noble views of religion, and of the benefits it has conferred on the human race. But we must penetrate more deeply into its spirit, if we would personally know its power. We must go with it into our closets, and commune with it alone, and submit our motives, desires, and purposes to its strict and unsparing scrutiny, however painful it may be. We must retire from those wide considerations, which connect it with the world around us, and view ourselves as the *peculiar* objects of its counsels, its precepts, its warnings, its hopes, and its fears. Religion must be permitted to address us, as Nathan addressed David; it must say, '*thou*

art the man.' It must not stand before us in the distance, merely as a bright vision to gratify our sense of the moral sublime; it must be felt in its presence and nearness, as a subject of personal concern, and as bringing an errand from God to *our* hearts and souls. All this it must certainly do, or it cannot be *experimental* religion.

Does the voice of nature and of revelation teach us that there is a God, an Infinite Spirit, who rules all worlds? Then let each one say — this God is *my* Father, *my* Creator, *my* Governor, and will be *my* Judge. — Are we taught that we stand responsible to the bar of heaven for the use of all our gifts and privileges? Let every individual, then, consider how this awful truth bears upon him personally, and what answer *he* could give, were he now summoned to his final account. — Does Christianity present to us that Saviour, who came to bring light and pardon to a world lying in darkness and sin, and 'to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works?' Then let every one solemnly ask himself — has Christianity been to me *personally* 'the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation?' Have I imbibed the spirit and imitated the example of him, who lived and died for me? — And does the Gospel teach us, that our spirits go not down to the dust with our bodies, but are made for immortality and retribution? Does it disclose to our view the world beyond the grave, in which 'tribulation and anguish shall be upon every soul of man that doeth evil, but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good?' Let this solemn thought, then, personally affect each one of us; and let every heart seek earnestly for itself, that 'an entrance may be ministered into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and

Saviour, Jesus Christ.' — By such applications as these, of the searching truths of Christianity, our religion may become a *personal* concern; and this will be one of the effectual means of making it *experimental*. When, therefore, the instructions and exhortations of divine truth occur to thy mind, do not meet them with the cold reflection that they belong to others; be assured, that they belong to thee, that thou hast a personal concern in them of imperishable and everlasting value. Then shalt thou know by thine own experience the strengthening and refreshing influence of heavenly truth: then shalt thou have 'rejoicing in thyself, and not in another.'

3. The last step, which I shall mention, in the acquisition of experimental religion is, that it must be within us a governing *principle of life and conduct*. Without this, all the rest is useless. — It is in vain that we realize the truths of Christianity as having an actual and distinct existence; it is in vain that we view them as applicable in a personal manner to ourselves, unless they become habitual principles of action, and manifest themselves in all the ways of good living. Till they have become so, though they may, like barren trees, stand forth in form and comeliness, yet they have no deep, vigorous roots, and are laden with no precious fruits. Let it appear that religion pervades the life, that its spirit is infused into our temper and conduct, that our daily thoughts, motives, and purposes are purified and consecrated by its influences, — then, and then only, will it be *experimental* religion.

This is the ultimate test, by which the profession of a personal acquaintance with the spirit of Christianity is to be tried and proved. It is easy and common enough to talk in vague and high-wrought strains about conver-

sion and about experimental religion; but to manifest, in our daily conduct and dispositions, the experience of real religion in our hearts is much more difficult, and at the same time incomparably better and more satisfactory. There is something very deceptive to many minds in the practice, which is so common, of pointing out a specific time, when a certain swell of feeling — they scarcely know what or whence — passed over their minds; in supposing themselves to have been brought out of darkness into marvellous light by one process, if not instantly; and in loving the mere means and observances of Christianity. While they become deeply engaged in these things, they are apt to mistake the warmth and eagerness, which they excite, for a real, personal interest in religion itself.

The object at which all the means and institutions of the Gospel aim, is purity of heart and life; without this, its purpose is not answered. Men may say what they will; but Christ and his Apostles teach us, that we have no more religion than we have moral goodness, no more piety than we have virtue. All the professions, all the fervor, all the excitement in the world are as empty and unmeaning as the babbling of a noisy brook, if they do not make us better. And by this, I mean really and practically better, as Christians and as members of society. I do not mean making us think ourselves a great deal better than all the rest of the world, and say in the spirit of the Pharisee of old — 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are,' and deny the name and character of Christians to those around us, whose lives and conduct are at least as near the christian standard, as our own. We are free to confess,

that the only experimental religion, which we deem valuable, is that which consists in being good and doing good on christian principles and with christian motives: and not that, which consists only or mainly in certain floating feelings and mysterious transactions between God and the soul. The man, whose life manifests that the flame of piety is burning, like a holy fire, upon the altar of the heart within; who, like his Saviour, 'goes about doing good;' who lives under a solemn sense of his accountableness in the sight of God; who receives the blessings, that fall to his lot, with a devout remembrance of the great Source from which they come, and bows himself to affliction with a full persuasion that it is administered by the hand of paternal mercy, and with the spirit of submission that says, 'Father, not my will, but thine be done;' who habitually connects in his thoughts earth with heaven, and time with eternity; who 'uses this world, as not abusing it, remembering that the fashion thereof passeth away;' who daily lives 'as seeing God who is invisible,' never forgetting that 'the things which are seen are temporal, while the things that are unseen are eternal,' — this is he, who has, in the only proper and gospel sense, *experimental religion*, for he only it is, who gives an undeniable and standing proof, that Christianity is with him a practical, guiding, governing principle of conduct.

These, then, we conceive to be the elementary principles of what may be truly called experimental religion; first, that the great truths of Christianity must be heartily received as strong and distinct realities; second, that they must be embraced in their application to ourselves personally, as something in which we have a peculiar concern; and third, that they must become

principles of conduct, pervading the life, sanctifying the motives, and forming the habits of the souk In this explanation of the subject, I think, we have the sanction alike of Scripture and of reason, and are unembarrassed by anything of a fanatical or visionary nature.

From this statement, it is plain that experimental religion, taken in its true sense, is not to be acquired or finished by one effort or by one process. Some people talk of experiencing religion at a particular time, as if it were to be done but once, or all at once. This is certainly a very strange notion. We must experience religion, not once merely, or at a certain time, but every day and at all times ; that is, religion must always be at our side, as our guide, counsellor, friend, and support. It must be interwoven with our whole moral and spiritual frame. It must enter into the composition of the character in all its parts, and not be *borne in* upon it, as a distinct, independent, foreign substance. It does not come at a particular moment, like the sudden arrival of a stranger, who merely takes up his abode with us, without feeling any interest in our every day business and pursuits; it is rather an unreserved and familiar friend, whose intimacy grows every day more close and dear, and who enters constantly and heartily into all the common cares and duties, which 'the Providence of God hath adopted into the family of religion.' In short, its true nature cannot be so well set forth, as in that beautiful description by our Saviour; 'And he said, so is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth

forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.'

And now if you ask, how this experimental religion is to be acquired, the answer is, by the use of the means which God has appointed for the purpose. These means are the habitual study of the Scriptures, especially of the words of Jesus Christ, devout and heartfelt prayer, attendance upon the institutions and ordinances of the Gospel, the perusal of good books, a serious improvement of the events of God's providence, &c. Those afflictive dispensations, which bring our thoughts to a solemn pause, are our teachers; the examples of the good and the bad are our teachers; death is our teacher: and Christianity, properly understood, is a system of means for the formation of a holy character, for the purification of the heart, and the salvation of the soul. In all these ways is experimental religion to be acquired.

In saying this, I do not deny that spiritual influences from above are concerned in the production of a religious frame of mind. On the contrary, I believe most sincerely in those influences, when explained scripturally and rationally; but I do not believe that ecstasies, and visions, and vicissitudes of the animal spirits are those influences. The agency of the spirit of God comes to us now in the channel of appointed means, or coincides with the operation of these means, so as not to be distinguished from them. If it be not so, then the age of miracles has not, as is commonly supposed, gone by. Men are too apt to be dissatisfied with the moral constitution of things, as established by God. The regular means of religion seem tame and spiritless to diseased imaginations; they crave something out of

the common course. But the Gospel bids us expect no such thing; and it deserves well to be considered by every one, whether the kind of religion, which is acquired in this way, be so likely to be strong, useful, and permanent, — in short, to be really *experimental religion*, as that, which has become engrained in the whole texture of the soul by a long and gradual process, is connected with every principle of moral action, and operates like good leaven in the whole of the life and character. The celebrated Dr Owen, who was one of the most eminent champions of 'orthodoxy' in his day, has well remarked, that 'as water that ariseth and floweth from a living spring runneth equally and constantly, unless it be obstructed or diverted by some violent opposition, but that which is from thunder-showers runs furiously for a season, but is quickly dried up; so are those spiritual thoughts, which arise from a prevalent internal principle of grace in the heart; they are even and constant, unless an interruption be put upon them for a season by temptations; but those, which are excited by the thunder of convictions, however their streams may be filled for a season, quickly dry up and utterly decay.'

Finally; we think that religion is experienced differently by different individuals; in some, by a more striking and rapid operation of the means of grace, than ordinary; in others, by a gradual and quiet incorporation of Christianity into the soul from childhood to old age. The remark has been made, and it is an excellent one, that 'we should neither prescribe our personal experiences and feelings as a rule for others, nor make the experiences and feelings of others a law to us.' We do not think that experimental religion is showy and

noisy, that it seeks public exhibitions, and is not satisfied till it has been registered before the world, or that it loves to blow a trumpet, or hang out a flag; for we are accustomed to believe that quick and ostentatious effects are not generally the best effects, nor the only true indications of the progress of real Christianity, nor the only sure evidences of the blessing of Heaven upon a pastor's labors. We do not deem that sort of commotion to be very desirable, in the confusion of which the mind mistakes the glow of emotion for permanent piety, and the fervors of imagination for signs of grace; for we have seen enough to convince us that the whole soul may be smitten down in fear and despair, or lifted up with swelling raptures, without any impressions being produced, which are permanently religious. We think ourselves justified in supposing it to be spiritual pride, rather than an experience of religion, which leads men to speak of their fellow Christians as children of darkness and of wrath, to pity the whole world besides themselves, to regard and to talk of the inclosures, within which their sects have fenced themselves, as a kind of privileged Goshen, and to thank God, with a very strange sort of gratitude, that he has made them so much wiser and holier than other human beings. We do not think, that an experimental acquaintance with Christianity requires us to make boastful comparisons of ourselves with others, nor to point the finger of reproach at such of our fellow men, as do not see with our eyes on religious subjects. — But we do believe, that *experimental religion* is a religion which is seated in the heart, and sends out thence its influences on the life; that it is a principle of internal purity and heavenly mindedness; that it is something very different from

that pretended religion which enlightens, perhaps, but does not warm; very different from that empty form of Christianity which floats around the heart, without ever becoming a sanctifying power, and which leaves men with a name to live, yet dead; that it brings the truths of the Gospel home to the bosoms and consciences of mankind, and thus awakens the sinner from the sleep of spiritual death, and animates the saint to a still better progress in the christian course; that its essence is in that faith which works by love, without which it is impossible to please God, and in that holy life, which — to use the words of a pious writer — 'is the only perfection of repentance, and the firm ground upon which we can cast the anchor of hope in the mercies of God through Jesus Christ.'

Such we conceive *experimental religion* to be; and our prayer, and we trust our labor is, that it 'may have free course, and be glorified.'

There is surely no worthier object of prayer and of labor than this; for Christianity is the most precious of God's gifts to man, and he who has experienced its sanctifying power, has found that happiness, which the world can neither give nor take away. By improvement in the divine life, by receiving the spirit of religion as his guide, his support, and his best friend, he cooperates in the accomplishment of the great and beneficent purpose for which the Gospel was given. When a man cultivates his spiritual nature under the influences of Christianity, he can hardly estimate the importance and greatness of what he is doing. The work of experimental religion, considered as a personal improvement in holiness, fulfils the purposes of God's wisdom and mercy in giving Christianity to the world. Every pas-

sion subdued under the power of christian principles is a testimony to the efficacy of that dispensation, which God ordained 'before the world was;' every holy affection is a tribute of praise to him, who lived and died that he might 'redeem us from all iniquity;' every pure feeling is a worthy offering to him, who opened the fountain of purification in his gospel; every virtuous desire is of the nature of devotion to our Master's cause; every instance of self-denial, proceeding from religious principle, is a sacrifice well pleasing to God; every good deed, however humble the disciple who performs it, redounds to the honor of him whose life is described by saying, that 'he went about doing good.' And these are the elements of which experimental religion is composed. Well would it be, if we could realize more deeply the whole extent of that relation to God and eternity, which personal improvement, even in a single virtue, bears; well would it be, if we knew the worth even of a single grace, as a part of the glory which Jesus Christ imparts to his true disciples. If the value of these were thoroughly understood, men would not rush into fanaticism on the one hand, nor slumber in unconcern on the other, — extremes alike pernicious and alike unreasonable. They would find that between them there is a spot where true religious wisdom dwells, — that there is a heartfelt interest in divine truth, worthy of an enlightened and reflecting being, equally remote from the frigid zone of indifference, and from the hot and withering regions of intemperate zeal. This is the point at which true experimental religion would place us, — the point where alone we can rationally expect to find a happiness beyond the reach of time and death.

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THE

DOCTRINE OF PRONOUNS

APPLIED TO

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY OF HIMSELF.

BY NOAH WORCESTER, D.D.

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PREFACE.

Situated and employed as the writer of the following pages has been for a number of years, it may be thought that he now deviates from the path of prudence, in suffering this Tract to appear with his name. He therefore deems it proper to say, that he has long been grieved to see his fellow Christians alienated from each other; that he has believed these alienations to arise in a great degree from contentions about the natural dignity of the Messiah, while far too little respect has been paid to the spirit he displayed in his example, and enjoined by his precepts; that when the argument stated in this Tract occurred to his mind, it impressed him with a belief that it was adapted to command the attention of all serious Christians, as they must feel interested to have the moral character of their common Lord stand unimpeached by any hypothesis for explaining his testimony. He has reflected much on the subject since the argument was reduced to writing, and has not been able to discover any rational or scriptural ground on which it is liable to objection.

He is, therefore, led to hope, that by giving it to the public he may do something which will produce more caution, more candor, more forbearance and brotherly love among brethren of different sects; and that in consequence of this change of feeling, they will be better prepared to unite their exertions to abolish all antichristian customs. That the writer should indulge such a hope may appear

to many as the fruit of arrogance or delusion; yet were it not for this hope, he would sooner commit the manuscript to the flames than send it to the printer. From a review of the history of Christians, from the days of Constantine to this century, it would appear that the greater part of the clergy have thought it a very light thing for men to live in hatred and strife, or even to be employed in shedding each other's blood, compared with being in error respecting the natural dignity of the Son of God. How numerous have been the volumes published on this subject, and how innumerable the sermons which have been delivered, while there has been an almost total silence as to any proper testimony against a custom, which involves every species of crime, and has destroyed more than a thousand millions of our race. Instead of bearing proper testimony against this custom, a very great portion of the clergy have, for fourteen centuries, been directly or indirectly promoters of robbery and bloodshed! If the clergy of Christendom would now lay aside their party and sectarian animosities, and unite their exertions to cultivate and diffuse the gospel principles of love, forbearance, and peace, how glorious must be the effects! Soon the several countries might be filled with the blessed fruits of that wisdom which is from above.

The writer was once himself a Trinitarian, and he has not forgotten that he then conscientiously adopted the very mode of interpreting our Saviour's testimony to which he now objects. He therefore freely acquits others of insincerity or wrong motive, in adopting the principle which he now believes to be incorrect and dangerous. He has ever felt a respect for the denomination of Christians from which he found it his duty to dissent, and he wishes ever to retain towards them the feelings of a brother. If this Tract may be the means of abating the unkind and unconciliatory spirit, which has long been too manifest among Christians, he will not have labored in vain; but if it should cause an increase of that spirit, it will be to him an occasion of deep regret.

THE

DOCTRINE OF PRONOUNS

APPLIED TO

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY OF HIMSELF.

No. 1. *The Doctrine of Pronouns stated.*

Pronouns are words used as substitutes for the names of persons or things, to avoid a too frequent repetition of the same word or sound.

A personal pronoun is a substitute for the name or title of a person; and it implies all that the name or title would imply, if used in the same place.

Example. Abraham was a good man, he was the friend of God, and God loved him and made a covenant with him. In this sentence he is used once and him twice as a substitute for the name Abraham. The meaning would be the same in the following form — Abraham was a good man, Abraham was the friend of God, and God loved Abraham and made a covenant with Abraham. He and him therefore are pronouns. The word person is applied to any intelligent being — to God, to Christ, to any angel, or any man, whether in the body or out of the body. A human person in the present state is supposed to possess two distinct natures — a body and

a soul — the one matter, the other mind or spirit — the one mortal, the other immortal. These two natures, with all the members, senses, properties and powers of the body, and all the energies or faculties of the mind or soul, are so united and identified as to be but one person. Yet notwithstanding this union and identity, some things may be affirmed of one member or part of the person, which cannot be affirmed of another, nor of the man considered as a person.

A man may say 'My *hands* can neither see nor hear nor taste nor smell; and my *hair* cannot feel.' Yet he may not say of himself as a person, '*I* can neither see nor hear nor taste nor smell nor feel.' So a man may say 'My *body* cannot think nor will, nor has *it* any consciousness of right or wrong.' Yet he cannot say this of his mind or soul, nor of himself as a person. It would be falsehood for him to say, '*I* cannot think nor will, nor have *I* any sense of right or wrong.'

The pronouns, *I*, *my*, *myself*, include the whole person. Suppose then that John should say, '*I* cannot think *I* cannot choose, *I* have no sense of right or wrong.' Peter asks him what he means by such strange declarations. John replies, 'I spoke only of my *body*, my inferior nature. I did not say that my *soul* could not do these things.' Now what would be thought of John's veracity, or the propriety of his explanation?

In the common use of language, when a man has occasion to speak of any part of his person, and to affirm of that part what is not true of his whole person, he uses the neuter pronoun *it*. It is so even of his soul, which is the most important part of his person. There

is one exception, and one only, which occurs to my mind. Among Christians, who believe in the immortality of the soul as well as the mortality of the body, custom has authorized the use of an apparent contradiction. A man may say, '*I* shall die, and *I* shall not die; *I* shall live but a little while, and *I* shall live for ever.' Here the personal pronoun *I* is used in both cases. But such a manner of speaking would be very improper, if the declarations were made to a person or an audience unacquainted with the doctrine of the soul's immortality.

No. 2. *The Doctrine of Pronouns applied.*

Let the preceding remarks be applied to the Trinitarian mode of explaining the testimony of Christ respecting his dependence on God. It is well known that the Trinitarian adopts this hypothesis, — that Christ is God and man in one person. Here we have two distinct minds to one body, supposed to be united and identified in the one person, Jesus Christ. The possibility of such a union I shall neither deny nor discuss. I am ignorant on that subject. But admitting the hypothesis to be correct, it is very clear that the *man* is as nothing to the Deity in this person. The Divinity must be all in all, as to the sufficiency, the operations, and the glory of Christ.

In this case, as in the one before stated, some things might be truly affirmed of one part of the person, which could not with propriety be said of the other. But when Christ or any other person says, *I* can, or *I* cannot do this or that, the pronoun *I* embraces all the powers of the person. Every one will admit that it would be improper

for me to say, 'I cannot think,' excepting to clear myself from falsehood, on being questioned, by saying that I spoke only of my body or my little finger.

How unfortunate then is the method which has been adopted in explaining the language of Christ. He said, "I can do nothing of myself; the Father in me, he doeth the works." "My Father is greater than I." When such language is urged as proof that Christ was not the independent God, the Trinitarians venture to say, that, in such declarations, 'Christ spoke only of his human nature. As *man* he was dependent; yet as God he was independent.'

Let it now be supposed that, on the trial of Christ before the Jewish Sanhedrim, he had been questioned as to his meaning in so often declaring his dependence on God: suppose too that he had given the Trinitarian explanation, saying — 'I spoke then of my human nature only; yet I am God, equal with the Father. Nay, I am the God of Abraham, who was worshipped by your fathers, and whom you profess to worship.' Would not his judges have had ground for a more serious accusation than they had on his owning that he was the Son of God? Might they not very justly have said to him, — 'Either the language which you adopted in your preaching to the people was equivocal and deceptive, or what you have now said is positively false. Asserting, as you did, that you could do nothing of yourself, was a full declaration that you had no claim to be regarded as God. How then can you now expect to be believed in saying, that you are God, equal with the Father? Besides, who before this ever heard of the FATHER of Abraham's God?'

But no such formidable accusation could his enemies bring against "the Faithful and True Witness." Never, I believe, did the Messiah, in any instance, so contradict his testimony respecting his dependence, as to intimate even to his apostles, that he was God and man in one person; or that he was in any sense or respect the independent God. Nor does it appear that his apostles ever understood him to assert his independence or self existence.

No. 3. *John's care to prevent Misapprehensions.*

John was the disciple whom Jesus loved, the last of the Evangelists who wrote his history, and the one who recorded the discourses in which Christ most explicitly asserted his dependence on God, for his commission and authority, his wisdom and power, in all he said or did. In many instances John evinced special care to have the words of Christ understood, or to prevent any misapprehensions of his meaning. He not only explained several names and titles, as Cephas, Thomas, Siloam, Rabbi, and Messiah, but he also told Christ's meaning in several instances, in which he had been misapprehended by his hearers, and some which were likely to be misunderstood by the readers of his history.

In the second chapter we are told that the Jews said to Jesus,—"What signs showest thou unto us, seeing thou doest these thing?" To this demand Jesus answered,—"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." By their reply the Jews fully evinced that they misunderstood what he meant by the temple. Jesus did

not then deem it incumbent on him to correct their mistake. But lest readers should be at a loss respecting Christ's meaning, John thus explains, — "But Jesus spake of the temple of his body." v. 18 — 21.

In chapter vi. 64, Jesus said to his audience, — "But there are some of you that believe not." John explains, — "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him."

Chapter vii. 38, 39, Jesus had said, — "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." On this metaphorical language, John observes, — "But this spake he of the spirit which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified."

John xi. 11, 12, 13, Jesus said to his disciples,—"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, and I go that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep he shall do well." John then explains, — "Howbeit Jesus spake of his death; but they thought he had spoken of taking rest in sleep."

John xii. 32, Jesus said, — "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John again explains, "This he said, signifying what death he should die."

John xiii. 10, 11. While washing his disciples' feet, Jesus said, —"Ye are clean, but not all." The reason for this remark is given by John, — "For he knew who should betray him, therefore he said, ye are not all clean."

John xxi. 18. Jesus said to Peter, — "Verily, verily I

say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not." Here John adds, — "This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God."

In the last mentioned chapter, John relates, that, "Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith to him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"—Having related the question and the answer, John states and corrects a mistake which occurred,—"Then went this saying abroad among the brethren that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

Now let it be seriously considered how often Christ had in a direct form declared his dependence on God, or disclaimed self-sufficiency — and how certain it is that John must have known that such language was adapted to impress the belief that Christ was not the independent God: then we may ask, why did not John give an explanation, as in less urgent cases, and say, — 'these things Christ spoke of his human nature, and not of himself as God?' Surely if John knew or believed that Christ was an independent person or being, he must also have known that such an explanation was of vastly greater importance than any now to be found in his gospel. Had he been a Trinitarian, like those of modern times, he would not have suffered such a mass of testimony, importing the personal and absolute dependence of Christ, to have passed without endeavoring to neutralize it by

some explanation. Had John regarded Christ as God, of how little importance it would have appeared to him to explain what Christ meant by the *sleep* of Lazarus, or the *temple* that he would raise up in three days, compared with telling what he meant by a hundred passages, which implied that he was a dependent being, and received all his sufficiency from the Father!

It is not in my heart to call in question the uprightness or sincerity of my Trinitarian brethren; but I am compelled to wonder, that they do not see, that their explanation of our Lord's words imputes to him such a habit of using equivocal and deceptive language, as would ruin the character of any other person. Had he been an independent person, I know not what language he could have used more false and deceptive than many things which John has recorded, as said by him. Yet this language was not explained by himself, nor by his careful and friendly disciple. Neither by himself nor by John is it so much as intimated that, in speaking of his personal dependence, he did not speak of his *whole person*, as Moses would have done in using the same language. Is it not then an extraordinary method of honoring the Messiah, to assert his *independence* at the expense of his *veracity?* Yet this seems to be done with very great confidence by his Trinitarian disciples. But let any Trinitarian ask himself, whether he would feel safe in frequently using such deceptive language, without explanation, as his theory imputes to him in whose lips there was no guile? May I not say that a good man would shrink with horror at the thought of adopting such a practice?

No. 4. *The Trinitarian's explanation not accordant with his own Hypothesis.*

I may now advance a step farther. If Jesus Christ was personally the independent God, his declarations of dependence on the Father *cannot be true*, in the sense contended for by Trinitarians. For their hypothesis is not that the human nature was united to the Father, but to a second person, as independent as the Father. Now who cannot see that personal self-sufficiency precludes the possibility of personal dependence? If Christ was personally self-sufficient, how could his human nature need any aid from another person? Yet Christ did assert his personal dependence on the Father. He did not say, 'My human nature can do nothing of itself, yet I as God do the work.' But speaking of himself as a distinct person, as the Messiah, the Son of God, he says, "Of my own self I can do nothing."—"The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works,"—"If ye loved me ye would rejoice that I said I go to my Father, for the Father is greater than I." "I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath *taught me*, I speak these things."

Could such declarations possibly be true, had Christ been like the Father, self-sufficient and independent? Had it been a special object of Christ to put his disciples on their guard against deifying himself, I hardly know what language he could have used better adapted to such a purpose. Had he said, 'I am not God, but the dependent Son and Ambassador of God,' the Trinitarian might still have said, — "he spoke only of his human nature;" and that too, I believe, with as much propri-

ety as he gives this explanation to what we have on record.

Another question occurs. If the Messiah was personally the living God, what occasion or motive could he have had to speak of the dependence of his human nature on a different person? Was not his own infinite wisdom and almighty power sufficient to supply all the defects and wants of his human nature? Besides, what motive could there have been for him to speak of the dependence of his human nature in a manner, which he must have known implied the dependence of his whole person? The question whether he was a dependent or an independent being, was one of great importance. It is so viewed at this day by his friends of all denominations. It could not be otherwise viewed by the Messiah himself, and by his apostles. If, then, on a subject so serious and interesting to mankind, he could habitually speak in language so equivocal, so deceptive, so completely adapted to mislead both the learned and the ignorant, what confidence can be placed in what he said on other subjects? If he could repeatedly say, "I can do *nothing of myself*," while in fact he could do *every thing of himself*, what evidence can we have, that he had not in all he said a concealed meaning, directly opposite to what his words naturally conveyed? Something more serious in my view than the *natural dignity* of the Messiah is involved in the present inquiry — that is, his *moral dignity*, his uprightness, his benevolence, and his veracity, as a Teacher sent from God.

No. 5. *Two important texts considered.*

In the affectionate interview between Christ and his

apostles a little before the crucifixion, he said to them,—"The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God," In his prayer immediately following, while speaking of the apostles, Christ said to the Father, — "Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee; for I have given unto them the words which thou gavest unto me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and have believed that thou didst send me."

These passages deserve the serious attention of Christians. To have known surely that Christ "came out from God," and to "believe that God sent him," must be very different from knowing that Christ was God, equal with the Father, and believing that he was an independent being. This must be admitted by Trinitarians; for they censure the faith of Unitarians, as heretical or defective, although they verily believe that Christ "came out from God," and was *sent by* God. Yet I think it must be owned, that Christ, in his prayer, approved the faith of his apostles in saying, "They have believed that thou didst send me;"—and that, too, without the least intimation that they ever had believed, or ever would believe, that he was the living God.

I may further remark, that, in the passage first quoted, Christ gave them a solemn assurance of God's love to them, and explicitly stated *why* they were so beloved of God. He however did not say,—"The father loveth you because ye have believed" that I am God and his equal—but these are his words—"The father himself loveth you because ye have *loved me*, and have *believed that I came out from God.*" After having heard the numerous and

dreadful censures, which have be enpassed on all who believe that Christ was not God, but a beloved Son who "came out from God," as commissioned and sent by the Father; who would have supposed that such a text as we have now before us could be found in the Bible? If Christ did not mistake as to the ground of God's approving love of the apostles, there certainly appears a great difference of opinion and feeling, between God and too many Trinitarians. The very faith which was approved both by God and his Son, has been censured as blasphemous by many who would have it supposed that they are truly orthodox in their views of the Messiah.

It can be of no avail here to say, — "It was only the *human nature* that the apostles believed "came out from God."" For their love to Christ, and their believing that he came out from God, are the only grounds on which it is said "the Father himself loveth you;" Besides, believing that Christ "came out from God" is the only article of faith mentioned in the text. Whether the doctrine, that Christ is the independent God, be true or false, it certainly was not a belief in this doctrine which secured to the apostles the Father's love.

No. 6. *Dr. Campbell's interrogations applied.*

Dodwell wrote in favor of Episcopacy, and asserted things which Dr. Campbell regarded as adding to the words of God. The Doctor, in his Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, addresses two questions to Mr. Dodwell, which I think, with the omission of one word and the asperity of manner, might properly be addressed to a Trinitarian expositor. The questions are the following— "Shall I then believe that God, like deceitful man,

speaketh equivocally and with mental reservations? Shall I take his declaration in the extent wherein he hath expressly given it; or as you, for your own [malignant] purpose, have new-vamped and corrected it?"

With all my heart I have cancelled the word "malignat," though used by Dr. Campbell; for I have no disposition to impute a "malignant purpose" to my brethren in their strange interpretations of our Saviour's words; nor in what they venture to "add" to them. But abating the asperity with which the Doctor proposed the questions, I know not another case to which they may be more properly applied, than to the explanations which have been given of our Lord's testimony relating to himself. For "mental reservations" are imputed to him, which, had he expressed them, would have rendered his testimony quite another thing from what it now is. Such "mental reservations" are imputed to him not merely once or twice, but a great number of times; — not in predictions which were to be explained by their fulfilment; nor in parables, nor on trivial subjects; but in solemn private conversations with his apostles, respecting his own character and mission, and while preparing their minds for the trying scene of his crucifixion, which was then at hand. Now what public teacher, nay what good man, would be willing to have such a habit of equivocation and "mental reservation" imputed to himself, as has been imputed to our constituted Lord and final Judge?

No sincere Christian can wish it to be believed, that the Messiah designedly used deceptive language, to lead his followers into error respecting his character. If he

did not, his language must be interpreted on the same principles, which are applicable to the language of other ambassadors sent by God to men — unless he has given an explanation himself, or by some inspired apostle. What then would be the meaning of his language of personal dependence on God, had it been used by Moses?

On the same principles too we may ask, what must be the meaning of Christ's words when he said "*my God?*" His words, "my Father and your Father, my God and your God," as clearly imply that *he* had a God as that his *apostles* had a God. But is there any sense, in which the Supreme Being can say, "my Father," or "my God?" Yet it was not merely once that Christ personally acknowledged that he had a God. He did so in every prayer; he did so on the cross — "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Besides, I think few will deny that when Christ used the words "*my Father*," he spoke of the very same being as when he said "my God;" — and that by his Father he meant his God and our God. Every time, therefore, that Christ said, "my Father," or "my God," his words implied that he himself was not the Supreme Being. How numerous then are the passages, in which the Messiah clearly disclaimed all pretensions to be regarded as the Most High, the Jehovah of heaven and earth!

No. 7. *Conclusion.*

It will doubtless be remembered how freely Unitarians have been accused of irreverence for the scriptures, in accommodating them to their sentiments, by rejecting some passages in the common version and altering others. I do not deny that individuals may have given occasion

for such a charge against themselves. But I would ask seriously, whether there has been any thing in the conduct of Unitarians, in relation to the scriptures, which ought to excite more astonishment and regret, than the conduct of the whole body of Trinitarians, in their manner of explaining or interpreting the whole of Christ's testimony concerning himself. More, it is believed, than a hundred distinct declarations or observations, which implied his personal dependence, or that he was not God, must have something of the following import attached to neutralize them, or to render them consistent with the Trinitarian hypothesis. 'Here Christ spoke only of his human nature, though he was God as well as man.' Not only is the testimony of Christ thus interpolated and changed, but the testimonies of the evangelists and apostles respecting him, have shared a similar fate, that they may not contradict the Trinitarian doctrine. I have not computed the number of texts in the apostles' testimony, which clearly imply that Christ was not God; but I think they are more than two hundred. Now if such an addition or explanation is warrantable, is it not wonderful that the necessity of it never occurred to the mind of Christ, nor any one of his apostles or evangelists? Paul, in describing the warfare between the flesh and the spirit, makes use of the following language, — "For I know that in me (that is, in *my flesh*) dwelleth no good thing." Had he omitted the explanatory or parenthetical clause, how different would have been the meaning! Why did not the Messiah say,—"Of myself," that is, as a man, "I can do nothing?" Or "I can of myself," that is, of my human nature, "do nothing?" As no such saving clause is in any instance used by Christ, or suggested by

his apostles, it has at least the appearance of being wise above what is written, for men at this day to affirm that such a clause is always to be interpolated or understood, in all that Christ said importing his personal dependence.

If by asserting that Christ is God, were meant no more than that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" — that the miracles of Christ were properly the works of God; and that the doctrines and precepts of Christ were properly the words of God, which he "hath in these last days, spoken to us by his Son," — I could most cordially acquiesce. For all these ideas I firmly believe to be true. But more than this is intended by Trinitarians. They say that Christ himself was personally God, equal with the Father — that is, equal to *his* God and *our* God. If Paul had been of this opinion, instead of saying "God was in Christ," he might have said, "God was in God;" and instead of saying, "I bow my knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he might have said, "I bow my knees to the God and Father of our God Jesus Christ." In like manner, by the application of the Trinitarian hypothesis, almost every thing that is said of the character of the Messiah, by himself or his apostles, becomes unintelligible, or a contradiction to what their own words express. There surely is reason to question the correctness of a theory, which so palpably contradicts the testimony of Christ and his apostles.

Nothing, however, to be found in this discussion has been intended to impute blame, or to impeach the moral character of any of my brethren. But a hope is entertained, that the subject is set in such a light as will tend to excite more candor and union among Christians.

APPENDIX.

As I have said so much to prove that explanations were certainly necessary, respecting the language of dependence used by our Lord, if he was indeed the independent Jehovah, some may deem it incumbent on me to assign a reason, why no explanations were given of the passages, which have been supposed to imply his self-existence and independence. Should this be demanded of me, I may frankly say, that I do not think that it ever occurred to John, that such ideas would ever be inferred from anything which he recorded as the words of Christ. The two following texts are, I believe, more relied on to prove that Christ was God than any others, which were uttered by our Saviour.

Before Abraham was I am. John viii. 59.

I and my Father are one. John x. 30.

In the first of these texts, I cannot perceive that anything more was affirmed by Christ, than that he was before Abraham. I am however aware that the self-existence of Christ has been inferred from the words, "I am," with which the text closes. But Dr. Campbell, though a Trinitarian, freely admits that the words might be translated *I was*. Then the text would read, before Abraham was I was. If it occurred to John as possible that some might infer the self-existence of Christ from the words, "I am," on account of God's assuming the name I AM, in a conversation with Moses; the apostle might well suppose that such a suspicion would be laid aside, on comparing this text with what Christ said to the Jews in the fortieth

verse of the same chapter. "If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God: neither did I come of myself, but he sent me." What sense could be made of such declarations as the following, — God proceeded forth and came from God; neither did God come of himself, but God sent him! Yet such must be the import of Christ's words, if he was God.

In 1 Cor. xv. 10, Paul speaking of himself, says, "I am what I am." How similar is this to the language of Jehovah, "I am that I am!" If any one wished to prove Paul a *fourth* person in the "Godhead," with what force he might urge his assuming the divine name, "I am what I am." It might indeed be replied, that Paul said, "*by the grace of God* I am what I am," which plainly implied his dependence on God, and that of course he was not God. This is acknowledged to be fair reasoning. Why then is it not admitted, that the positive declarations of Christ respecting his dependence are proof that he did not mean to assert his self-existence by saying, "Before Abraham was I am?"

"I and my Father are one." All who are acquainted with the Greek know, that the word here translated *one* does not mean one person or one being, but "one thing," as one in affection, one as to interest, or having one or the same object of pursuit. So Paul says, — "He that planteth and he that watereth are one:" and Christ, in prayer for his followers, says, — "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me, that they may be one as we are." Again he says, "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be *one, even as we are one.*" If the Father

and Son are but one being, then Christ prayed that the innumerable multitude of his followers might become one being. I may further observe, that the language of scripture must be understood according to some analogy known to men, or not be understood at all. But what analogy does the universe afford, to justify us in supposing that the Son meant to say that he and his Father were one or the same being? If a king's son should use precisely the same language in regard to himself and his father, who would even suspect that such was his meaning? As such a meaning is foreign to all analogy, we have great reason to believe that it is equally foreign to the truth.

AN AFTER THOUGHT.

Hypothetical contrasts are sometimes useful. I shall therefore exhibit one. The recorded language of Christ we have seen to be as follows: — "I came not of myself — I have not spoken of myself, but the Father, who sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say — Of my own self I can do nothing — the Father, that dwelleth in me, he doeth the work." Accordant with these declarations was the whole testimony of Christ concerning himself.

Let it now be supposed that, instead of the foregoing declarations, he had said, — "I came of myself, I have spoken of myself, without receiving any commandment, authority, knowledge, or power from any superior. Of

mine own self I can do everything — no one in me doeth the work." Suppose, too, that the whole tenor of his testimony had implied his personal independence, self-sufficiency, and all-sufficiency.

Suppose, also, that the Unitarians had attempted to neutralize all this testimony, or to reconcile it to their hypothesis of the Son's dependence on God, by saying — 'When Christ used language which seems to imply personal independence, he is to be understood as speaking not of himself as a person, but of the DIVINE SPIRIT, or miraculous wisdom and power with which he was endued by God : — though he as a person was dependent, yet the SPIRIT OF GOD, which was given to him not by measure, was independent, and could do every thing.'

Now what would Trinitarians say to such a project for evading the force of our Lord's testimony ? Would they not pronounce it impious ? Might they not very justly affirm, that when Christ used the pronouns *I*, *myself*, *me*, he spoke of himself as a person, and that his declarations unequivocally affirmed his independence and self-sufficiency ? The case is so clear, that I do not see any reply that a Unitarian could make to such a statement. But if the *supposed* declarations of Christ respecting his personal independence would have been equivalent to saying, "I am God, and there is none besides me," why should not his *real* and *positive* declarations respecting his entire dependence be regarded as equivalent to saying, "I am not the independent God ?" Let prejudice keep silence, while conscience answers the question as in the presence of the Lord.

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SCRIPTURE.

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CONVERSATIONS

BETWEEN A MINISTER AND A PARISHIONER, ON SOME CORRUPTIONS OF SCRIPTURE.

CONVERSATION I.

Sunday Evening.

Parishioner. I could not have believed, if I had not heard with my own ears, that a minister of the gospel would speak of the Bible in the way you did in your lecture this evening. I hope you will not be offended if I tell you my mind plainly.

Minister. Certainly not; — but you surprise me: I know not what you mean. I am not aware that I said anything which could give offence to any one. I beg you will explain your meaning at once.

Par. Why sir, you told us, at least so I understood you, "that there were some things in the Bible which ought not to be there; that *this* text had been altered, and *that* added without authority; and that a good many others were badly translated." Now, I say, we may as well throw the Bible into the fire at once, as suffer it to be frittered away after this manner.

Min. Be calm — be calm, my friend. You do yourself and me injustice by giving way to your feelings after this manner. You do not suppose — you cannot in your conscience believe, that I would intentionally say any thing to weaken the authority of the Holy Scriptures. It is to them, you know, that I always appeal as the only certain rule of our faith and the only sure guide to heaven.

Par. I may have been too hasty, I admit. I do not wish to injure you. I have always thought that you wished to do good. Though we differ in some points in doctrine, I have not often found fault with your preaching, which I think is generally good as far as it goes. But little did I think, when you proposed to give a course of lectures on the New Testament, that you would speak of it in the way you did today. I cannot tell what your design was; but I am sure such things can do no good, and I very much fear that they will unsettle the minds of your hearers and lead them to think that the Bible is no more sacred than any other book.

Min. I am sorry you should think so. The course of lectures which I began today, I had hoped would prove acceptable and useful to all. Instead of leading my people to despise or to neglect the Bible, I had hoped that I should do something to induce them to read it oftener and to value it more. Perhaps you may yourself be convinced, that I have not been so much in fault as you now suppose, and that the remarks in my introductory lecture, which have given you so much offence, were not only true but highly important, and such as were called for by the circumstances of the times.

Par. I wish it may prove as you say; but I confess I have little hope that you will be able to defend yourself against the charge of rashness and imprudence at least. I should, however, like to hear what you have to offer in defence of sentiments so new and strange as those you advanced in your lecture.

Min. It is too late to discuss the subject farther this evening; but if you will call on me tomorrow, I will endeavor to explain to you my views, and will state the grounds on which I hold them. The subject is certainly an important one; and from what has passed between us, I am disposed to think that it is one, in regard to which the public mind requires to be enlightened. I am not offended at your warmth, for I apprehend that I have myself been somewhat in fault, in not preparing the way, by previous explanations, for the incidental remarks I made in my lecture on the corruptions of Scripture. I ought not to have taken it for granted that my hearers *must* understand what was so obvious and familiar to my own mind.

Par. I am more and more astonished at what you say; but I will call as you propose; for I am impatient to hear what it is that you have to communicate respecting the Bible, which can justify such language as you used in reference to it.

CONVERSATION II.

Monday Evening.

Mr Ward. You see I have kept my engagement; and I have come at an early hour, that we might have time for all that you have to communicate on the subject introduced at our interview last evening.

Min. I am glad to meet you again; for I acknowledge that I have felt a good deal of uneasiness since we last parted, at what passed between us. It grieves me to find that I have, though unintentionally, given offence to one whom I have ever esteemed as a conscientious man, and whose good opinion I certainly wish to retain.

You complained, if I understood you right, of that part of my lecture in which I asserted, not however in the terms or manner which you employed in relating what you heard, that the Bible, in its present state, meaning that in common use, differs in some respects from the Bible as it was first written; that words and sentences have been inserted or omitted, or altered, either designedly or by unintentional mistake: and that the received version, that is, the translation in common use in this country, is not always faithful to the original.

Mr W. That is precisely what I meant to complain of. I do not like to hear the Bible spoken of in this way. I have no other Bible but that in common use, written in good plain English; and if I had one in Hebrew or Greek, why, I could not read it, you know. If what you told us is true, what are we poor unlearned Christians to

do? I am sorry, very sorry, that you undertook to unsettle our faith. The Bible is as good now as it was in the days of our forefathers, and we want none better.

Min. What I asserted I believed to be true; and if true, I thought it ought to be generally known. I trust you are not one of those, who would have the people kept in ignorance by those whose duty it is to instruct them.

Mr W. Certainly not; but you will allow that there are some things that are true, which do not immediately concern us, and which it can do us no good to know. And if what you have said about the Bible is true, I think you had better have kept the knowledge of it to yourself.

Min. Does it not then concern *all* to know what is, and what is not, the pure word of God? Admitting that I have evidence, that is perfectly satisfactory to my own mind, that an important text, now found in our Bibles, does not belong there, but was inserted without any good authority, and is known by all learned men to be a forgery, what ought I to do? Must I keep silence and not dare to insinuate a doubt of its genuineness? And when I read the chapter which contains it, must I read right on, the forgery and all, thereby giving the same authority to the human addition as to the words of an inspired apostle? Would this be right? Would this be honest? Should I be justified in so doing? Should I not by my silence expose myself to the punishment threatened in these awful words, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book?" For if it is wrong to add anything to the Bible, it must also be wrong to

suffer what has been added to retain its place, if we can do anything to procure its removal. This would be to make ourselves *partakers of other mens' sins.*

Mr W. You surprise me by the confident tone you adopt. One might suppose, from the strong language you use, that you had been an eye-witness of the forgery you speak of. Pray, what is the text you are so anxious should be excluded from the Bible? and what is the evidence you mention as being so entirely satisfactory? And I should like to know, further, if it be as satisfactory to others as to yourself? If it is, and the text can be shown to be a forgery, why, then I grant that it ought to be rejected; for my Bible says, "Add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

Min. I will endeavor to satisfy you on these points. The text, to which my remarks applied, is found in 1 John v. 7, which in our Bibles stands thus: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one;" and with your leave, I will state in few words, some of the reasons which have convinced me and others, that these words were not originally a part of the Epistle in which they are now found. And if in doing this, I should make any assertion which does not appear to you to be supported by sufficient evidence, or the meaning of which you do not fully understand, I hope you will say so at once, and will ask for further proof or for further explanation.

Mr W. I will take you at your word; and I hope you will not blame me, nor think me impertinent, if I ask a good many questions.

Min. I began by stating what is asserted by those who have critically examined the subject, that the verse in question is not found in any Greek manuscript of the New Testament, excepting one which has very little authority.

Mr W. Hold, I confess I do not understand you. You say it is not found in *Greek manuscripts;* What is that to the purpose? Is it not found *in the Bible?* Has it not been there from time immemorial? At least I never saw a Bible in my life, which did not contain it. I have heard it said indeed, that Unitarians have a different Bible from that in common use; but I was always willing to believe that this was a groundless charge. I have seen a good many Bibles such as Unitarians read and give away; but I did not perceive that they differed in any respect from mine. I suppose the Bible was always the same that it is now; and for my part I do not think it right to alter it.

Min. Do you then suppose that your Bible contains the very words, which were spoken by the prophets and apostles, and by Jesus Christ! If it did, give me leave to say, you would not be able to understand a word that it contained. No; they spoke and their words were written down in languages which are now understood only by the learned; and your Bible and all the Bibles in common use, are only *translations* from the original languages, made by persons who took much pains to acquire a knowledge of them. You ask if the verse we have been considering has not been in the Bible from time immemorial? I assure you it has not. Why, my dear sir, it is but little more than 200 years since the translation

which you regard as so sacred was made; that is to say, since the Bible existed in its present form. Many other translations had been made before the one in common use, and many have been made since, both into English and into various other languages. No two of these translations are precisely alike, word for word: and what might naturally be supposed, some of them are better than others. Many Unitarians, as well as other Christians, possess copies of the Bible, especially of the New Testament, in different translations, and in several different languages. If this is what is meant by saying that *Unitarians have a different Bible from that in common use*, they must plead guilty to the charge. But it ought to be stated, that most of these translations were made by Orthodox men, who ought therefore to bear some part of the reproach which is cast on Unitarians for altering the Bible.

Mr W. I do not see what I can say in reply to this. You ought to know better than I, how the case stands; and I have no right to doubt your word. But you forget; we have wandered from the subject we were upon — *the Greek manuscripts.* Be so good as to inform me what these were, and what they have to do with the disputed text in John.

Min. All in good time. The Bible, as you have always known it, that is, the translation in common use, is, as I said, but little more than 200 years old. If we go back only one hundred years farther, we arrive at the time when the Bible was first *printed* in any language. The first edition of the Hebrew Bible was printed in 1488; and of the Greek Testament in 1516. The first

translation of the New Testament from the original Greek into English, was printed in 1526. It was made chiefly by William Tyndal, an Englishman, who ten years afterwards, was put to death for his offence, and his body reduced to ashes.

Mr W. Was there no English Bible before this time?

Min. There was. The celebrated John Wickliff, who lived about 450 years ago, translated the Bible from the Latin into English; but it was not printed till 1731; before which time it existed only in manuscripts. This was the first English Bible of which we have any account. Wickliff was the person, of whom you may have heard, whose bones were dug up 40 years after his death and ordered to be burnt and thrown into the river. It was decreed, about this time, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, "That no one should thereafter translate any text of the Holy Scripture into the English by way of a book, a little book or tract, and that no book of this kind should be read, that was composed lately, in the time of John Wickliff, or since his death."

Mr W. You remarked that it was but about 300 years since the Bible was printed in any language.—Pray, where was the Bible before that time?

Min. It existed only *in manuscripts*, that is, rolls of parchment or of some other substance, written with the pen, many of which were found in different parts of the world. Some of these manuscripts were in the Hebrew, some in the Greek, and some in various other languages. The Old Testament was first written in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek. What became of the original manuscripts is not known; but copies of them were taken

and preserved with much care; and new copies were made from time to time, as they were wanted by the Jews and Christians. Some hundred manuscript copies of the whole or of parts of the New Testament in Greek have been discovered within the last 300 years, and carefully examined by learned men, and the various readings noted with great accuracy. It was to them that I alluded when I said, that the disputed text in John was contained in no Greek manuscript excepting one of very little authority.

Mr W. I am not sure that I correctly understand what you mean by *various readings*. Be so good as to explain.

Min. The various readings are the different ways in which the same words or sentences are written in different manuscripts. Manuscripts, you know, are written with the hand, not printed like the books that we now read. All the copies of printed books of the same edition are just alike; but no two manuscripts of the Bible have ever been found exactly alike. Some words are *spelled* differently, some are *omitted* or *exchanged* for other words of the same or of a different meaning. In some manuscripts whole sentences are wanting which are contained in other manuscripts. All these differences have been, as I said, noted with accuracy — and are called *various readings*. But I was just going to state, that from these Greek manuscripts the Greek Testament was prepared for the press; and the English Testament was translated from the Greek. So that, if that text was not contained in the Greek manuscripts, it ought not to be in the Greek printed Testament; nor in the English Testament, for the same reason.

Mr W. True — clearly; but I suppose it is now found in the Greek Testament; pray, how did it come there?

Min. It was introduced by Erasmus, a distinguished scholar, who published the first edition of the New Testament in Greek. But what is worthy of remark, not one of the Greek manuscripts, which Erasmus *saw*, contained the passage in question. Accordingly he did not admit it into his first edition, printed in 1516, nor into his second, printed three years afterwards. Not finding it in any one of the manuscripts which were in his possession, he could not, as an honest man, have done otherwise.

Mr W. Yet you say that it was Erasmus who introduced it into the Greek Testament.

Min. Yes: the omission of it in his first two editions of the Greek Testament gave great offence to many persons, who had seen it in the Latin copies of the Bible, and who regarded it as a very important text in proof of the doctrine of the trinity. In reply to their complaints, Erasmus stated the grounds on which he had been led to reject it; but assured them that he would adopt it in his next edition, if *a single* manuscript could be found in which it was contained. Shortly after, word was sent him from England that such a manuscript had been found. Accordingly, without having seen the newly discovered manuscript, which is now known to be of quite modern date, and of a suspicious character, having pledged his word, and wearied too with a controversy which he probably did not regard as very important, he reluctantly yielded to the popular cry, and inserted the verse in his

third edition of the Greek Testament which was published in 1522.

Mr W. Has it been retained in all the Greek Testaments which have been published since ?

Min. It has not. It however was suffered to retain its place for many years, although it was believed by many learned men to be an interpolation.

Mr W. *Interpolation* — that is a term I never heard before.

Min. An interpolation is a word or passage inserted in the writings of an author, by some other person, without good authority. What is interpolated was not written by the author himself, but was added by some other hand. Many thought the verse in John an interpolation; yet after it had once found its way into the printed Testaments, it required more resolution and decision than most persons possess, to print the Testament without it. This however has been done in several recent editions of the Greek Testament, and particularly in one, the editor of which* was a Trinitarian, and one who spared no pains to render his edition as perfect as possible.

Mr W. Has the passage been omitted in any other editions of the New Testament ?

Min. It has either been omitted, or printed in smaller type, or enclosed in brackets, in many other editions. The great reformer, Luther, who translated the New Testament into German, refused to admit it into any of the editions published in his life-time: and, before his death, requested that his translation should upon no account be altered in the slightest instance. In all the

* Griesbach.

earliest editions in English, it is marked as suspicious, and in some more modern translations published by Unitarian Christians, it is wholly omitted.

Mr W. And are there other reasons still, for rejecting this text? I am impatient to learn what they are.

Min. You shall hear. First, the verse in question is not found in any of the ancient versions. This is an argument of very great weight; as it is morally certain, that if it had been contained in the original at the time when those versions were made, it would have been adopted together with the rest of the chapter in which it is now found.

Mr W. Allow me to interrupt you once more. I do not think I clearly understand what you mean by *ancient versions*. Be so good as to explain your meaning.

Min. The ancient versions of the New Testament are the translations that were made of it in ancient times, or in the first ages of Christianity. The New Testament was written in Greek; but, as the gospel was soon conveyed to many nations where the Greek language was not spoken, it was found necessary to translate it into various other languages, so that all Christians might read it in their native tongue. Several ancient versions have been preserved to this day; and it is found that not one of them contains the verse in question.

Another argument against the genuineness of this verse is taken from the silence of ancient authors, called the Greek and Latin Fathers, who wrote on the doctrines of Christianity, and whose writings abound in quotations from every part of the New Testament. Some of these writers warmly engaged in controversy respecting the na-

ture of Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of the trinity, and adduced every text that appeared to have the most remote bearing on the subject; and it is stated as a fact, that not one of the Greek Fathers, or those who wrote in the Greek language, has quoted, or so much as alluded to this verse in any work of which we have any knowledge; and that the same is true of the Latin Fathers, with the exception of one who wrote in the middle of the fifth century, in whose writings it is now found, though it is supposed that it has been added by a later hand.

Mr W. I believe I must give up the point. If what you say is true, I should think every one, I mean every one who knows the facts you have stated, would be forced to admit that the Bible has been altered, and that the text in John has been inserted without a good reason, and that it ought not to be suffered longer to retain its place in the inspired volume. Are learned men generally agreed in their views respecting this verse?

Min. I believe they are; if genuine, it is the most important text in the Bible to the believer in the trinity; yet it is seldom quoted or alluded to by learned Trinitarian writers at the present day; which is a sufficient proof, if any were needed, that they do not regard it as genuine. And besides, many Trinitarians have expressed their conviction that it is spurious, or does not belong to the Bible, in language as strong and explicit as it was possible for them to use.

Mr W. I should like to hear what they have said on this subject; for I am sure they would not give up this important text unless they had very strong reasons for so doing.

Min. Your remark is perfectly just. I will now read to you a few passages taken from Trinitarian authors, and leave you to draw your own conclusions. And as several of the most important of these are brought together in a little tract * which I have by me, I will read them as the author has quoted them.

"Let me first ask your attention to the *Eclectic Review*, the religious character of which is unsuspiciously orthodox.

"We are UNSPEAKABLY ASHAMED,' says the writer, 'that any modern divines should have fought for the retention of a passage so INDISPUTABLY SPURIOUS. We could adduce half a dozen, or half a score of passages of ample length, supported by better authority than this, but which are rejected in every printed edition and translation.'

The learned Griesbach, another believer in the trinity, says 'If it were worth while, I would undertake to defend *six hundred of the most futile and universally rejected readings* by testimonies and arguments equally numerous and valid, nay, in general, more numerous and valid, than those which the advocates of this passage adduce.'

Bishop Lowth, another learned Trinitarian, is equally decided. 'We have some wranglers in theology,' he says, 'sworn to follow their master, who are prepared to defend anything, however absurd, should there be occasion. But I believe there is no one among us, in the least degree conversant with sacred criticism, and having the use of his understanding, who would be willing to contend for the genuineness of the verse, 1 John, v. 7.'

Michaelis, in his most learned and valuable Introduction to the New Testament, says, 'It is very extraordinary that any man should *think* of opposing the testimony' in favor of this verse to the testimony against it. And again he says, 'One would suppose that no critic, especially if a Protestant, would hesitate a moment to condemn as spurious, a passage,' supported by such feeble evidence as this.

Dr Middleton, in his elaborate work on the Greek article, tells us, that this passage is 'now pretty generally abandoned as spurious;' and that if any one will study the controversy, 'the probable result will be, that he will close the examination with a *firm belief that the passage is spurious.*'

Mr Wardlaw, a late zealous and eloquent defender of the doctrine of the trinity, is no less positive. 'Certainly,' he says, 'this text should have been entitled to hold the first place, had its genuineness not been disputed, or disputed as that of many texts have been, on

* Two Letters addressed to Rev. Alexander M'Leod, D. D, of N. Y. by Henry Ware, Jun. (pp. 6, 7, — 8.)

slight grounds. I freely acknowledge, however, that the evidence of the spuriousness of this celebrated passage, even if it were much less conclusive, than, in my mind, it appears to be, would be quite sufficient to prevent me from resting upon it any part of the weight of this argument.'

To the same purpose the Bishop of Lincoln, in his "Elements of Christian Theology," says, "I must own, that after an attentive consideration of the controversy relative to that passage, *I am convinced that it is spurious.*"

Prof. Stuart undoubtedly holds the same opinion respecting this verse; for in adducing the texts in favor of the doctrine of the trinity, he omits all mention of this — whereas if he thought it genuine, he must have given it a conspicuous place.

To these names, some of them amongst the most honored in the church, might be added many more equally well known; it is enough to mention those eminent biblical critics, Simon and Wetstein; Benson, Grotius, and Semler, Sir Isaac Newton, Bishop Herbert Marsh, Archbishop Newcome, and the distinguished Methodist, Dr Adam Clarke; and, finally, that illustrious scholar, Porson.

Mr W. Well — I acknowledge I cannot withstand the reasons you have stated. They appear to my mind convincing. I had no suspicion that it was so plain a case. As the passage continues to be printed in our Bibles, I had supposed that it as properly belonged to the Bible as any other verse in it. You cannot tell, indeed you cannot, how much I was startled and shocked to hear you speak of it in the way you did. I was too hasty however in judging you. I ought not, I know, to have taken offence and shown my dislike in the way I did. I now see that you had reason on your side; and I sincerely thank you for the pains you have taken to set me right. There are several other points on which I wish for information, but it is growing late, and I have already heard enough to afford me matter for much reflection. I shall be happy however to renew the conversation at some future time.

Min. It will always give me pleasure to see you when I am at leisure, and to afford you any aid in my power.

CONVERSATION III.

Friday Evening.

Mr Ward. I have thought a good deal on the conversation we held the other evening respecting the verse in John ; and I must confess, that I am more and more convinced that it ought to be rejected from the Bible. I have not learning to examine the subject critically for myself; but when I find that Trinitarians speak of it in the same way as Unitarians, and do not depend on it for proof of the doctrine of the trinity, I must conclude that they had strong and sufficient reasons for so doing.

But I think you also stated in your lecture, that there were other texts which had been *altered* since the time of the Apostles, so as to convey a different meaning from what the writers intended. I am anxious to learn what these are ; for till this is ascertained, how can I know, when reading the Bible, that I do not read what has been added or altered since the time when the Bible was composed ?

Min. Your remark is perfectly just. It *is* important, and as important to you as to me, to know what is Scripture and what is not; and we are under great obligations to those learned men who have been willing to devote their time to the careful investigation of the subject, and who have published the results of their labors for the benefit of others. One of the most distinguished of these (Griesbach) was occupied in diligent study more than thirty years in preparing for the press his second admirable edition of the New Testament in Greek. Al-

though a Trinitarian, yet as an honest man, when he found that a text was manifestly corrupt, he did not retain it, because it favored his views, but corrected it according to the evidence which was presented to his mind. Although, in consulting numerous manuscripts of the New Testament, both in Greek and in other languages, he met with a great number of various readings, amounting in all, together with those which had been discovered before, to more than one hundred thousand, yet it is satisfactory to know that the number is very small of those which seriously affect the sense. Some of the most important of these I will now mention.

Mr W. Am I to understand then, that you follow the authority of a Trinitarian in what you regard as corruptions of Scripture ?

Min. I do. I beg you will bear this in mind through the whole of my remarks. Next to the text in John, which we have already considered, the most important corruption of Scripture is that in 1 Tim. iii. 16, where according to the received text we read : — "*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness ; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*" The true text would be rendered thus : — "*Great is the mystery of godliness. He who was manifest in the flesh, was justified,*" &c.

Mr W. Is the evidence in this case as strong as in the former ?

Min. I do not think it is ; though I should think it sufficient to convince any candid person, that the text as it now stands is corrupt. Many of the remarks, which

were made in reference to the passage in John, will apply to this. But you shall have the opportunity to judge for yourself. Here is a book (Sparks' Tracts, No. 4) which contains a very complete and satisfactory view of the subject on which we are conversing, in Two Letters written by the celebrated Sir Isaac Newton, which I should be happy to lend to you; and I am greatly mistaken if you do not find yourself well repaid for the careful perusal of them.

Mr W. It may be as you say; I should, however, like to see for myself, and will gladly accept your offer. But was the Sir Isaac Newton you mentioned, the great philosopher of that name, of whom we so often hear?

Min. The same; he was not only a great philosopher, but a learned theologian and a devout and humble Christian. I ought, however, to remind you, that Newton was not a Trinitarian, but a firm believer in the strict unity of God. You can make whatever allowance you please for this circumstance, in reading his writings. But I imagine you will see no cause to suspect him of unfairness in the statements and reasonings contained in these excellent Letters. And I ought to remark further, that although Newton agrees with the most learned critical writers of the present day in regarding this text, as it now stands in our Bibles, as corrupt, he differs from many of them in the amendment he prefers. The text, as he would restore it, would be rendered thus: — *Great is the mystery of godliness, which was manifest*, &c. The truth is, there is nearly equal evidence in favor of each of these readings; but very little in support of the text as it now stands.

Mr W. But the difference is too considerable between these various readings, to have happened by mistake. Who could be so careless as to mistake the word *God* for *He who*, or *Which*? A person who should write the former, instead of either of the latter of these expressions, must do it designedly, I should think.

Min. Your remark is just when applied to the English words, but not when applied to the corresponding words in Greek. This I think I can make intelligible to you, though you cannot read Greek.

Thus the Greek word Ο means *Which*,
ΟΣ means *He who*,
and ΘΣ* means *God*.

Observe how easily the *first* or the *second* of these expressions might be altered into the *third*. We are informed that this was done by the patriarch of Constantinople, Macedonius, in the beginning of the sixth century, for which he was banished by the emperor, (Anastasius); but, the friends of the patriarch afterwards prevailing, the alteration, which he had made in this text, obtained currency, and was willingly adopted as the true reading. (Sparks' Tracts, No. IV. p. 307 — 316. In addition to this, Sir Isaac Newton gives an account of two Greek manuscripts, in one of which it is evident from inspection that the *first*, and in the other that the *second*, of the Greek words I have just shown you has been altered with the pen, so as to make then conform to the received text. (pp. 315 — 317.)

Mr W. That must have been done *designedly*. I should not have thought that any one would have dared to treat the Bible in that way.

* Abbreviation for ΘΕΟΣ.

Min. It must have been done designedly, as you say; and it is sad to think, that any one should dare to commit such a fraud. But is it not equally surprising that any should be found willing to retain and use as genuine Scripture what is so manifestly corrupt?

Mr W. Yes, if they believed it to be corrupt; and I should think that the evidence you brought against the passage in John would convince every one that it is corrupt. But I am not ready to admit that the passage in Timothy, *God manifest in the flesh*, is not now just as it should be. I do not like the expression, *He who was manifest in the flesh.* There is no mystery in that. But the Apostle says, "Great is the mystery of godliness."

Min. Perhaps you are led into an error by the sound. Do you not mistake *godliness* for *Godhead*, and understand the Apostle to say, Great is the mystery of the Godhead, or of the Divine nature?

Mr W. Why, yes; I supposed that was his meaning.

Min. Consider then, that it is the mystery of *godliness*, or piety, or as the term may here be understood, *the whole scheme of human redemption by Jesus Christ*, i. e. *the method by which men are made godly or pious*, of which the Apostle speaks, without any allusion to the Divine nature, or the mystery of the incarnation, as it is sometimes called.

Mr W. I never heard the passage explained in that manner before. Indeed, as it is called a *mystery*, I did not suppose I could understand it, and therefore did not make the attempt.

Min. There is no good reason why we should not endeavor to understand what is termed in the Scriptures *a mystery.* A mystery is not something *unintelligible,* but something which *is* or *has been, hidden.* Now if the Apostle used language which he intended should be understood, I should be glad to know what rational meaning can be given to the expressions, God was manifest in the flesh; God was justified in the Spirit; God was seen of angels; God was preached to the Gentiles; God was believed on in the world; God was taken up into glory? Applied to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they convey an intelligible and consistent meaning. But how could God, who is himself a spirit, be *justified in the Spirit* ? And how could God, the eternal and immutable Jehovah, be *taken up into glory?*

Mr. W. I never thought of putting the words together after that manner. I believe, after all, the passage must be wrong as it now stands; and if the evidence against it is as strong as you intimated, I will not contend for it any longer. I shall lose no time in reading the book you have put into my hands. But are there other corruptions of Scripture as important as the two you have mentioned?

Min. Perhaps not quite as important. There are however several others, which are of sufficient importance to merit notice. Thus the text in Acts xx. 28, instead of "*the church of God,*" should read "*the church of the Lord* which he hath purchased with his own blood." I should think that every one would be glad that the evidence in favor of this change is so strong as it is, since there is something exceedingly shocking to the mind in the idea conveyed by the words as they now stand in our Bibles.

Indeed the evidence against it, derived from manuscripts, versions, and the ancient Fathers, is so strong, that I do not see how it can fail of carrying conviction to every candid mind.

Mr W. Well, I acknowledge that I never could like that expression myself; but as I found it in my Bible, I of course thought it must be right.

Min. I will only mention two other corruptions of Scripture, which, together with those I have already noticed, have an important bearing on Christian doctrines. The first is in Colossians ii. 2, 3. where, as the text now stands, we read *the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid, &c.* The clause *and of the Father and of Christ*, according to Griesbach, should be omitted, so that it will read thus; "the mystery of God, in which, i. e. in which mystery, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The last false reading, which I shall notice, is that in Revelations i. 11, where Jesus Christ is represented as saying, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," which clause should be wholly omitted; the evidence against it being sufficient, in the view of learned Trinitarians themselves, to authorize its rejection.

Mr W. I never heard much about the two texts you have last mentioned, and did not know that they were thought to be very important.

Min. Perhaps they are not so regarded generally; yet respecting the latter, Dr Doddridge thus remarks: "I cannot forbear recording it, that this text has done more than any other in the Bible, towards preventing me from

giving into that scheme, which would make our Lord Jesus Christ no more than a deified creature."

Mr W. Well, this is strange, I must confess. I have always considered the texts you have mentioned as some of the strongest in the Bible against Unitarians; and yet you bring strong evidence to show that they are corrupt. I should conclude from this that Trinitarians must have altered them to favor their views. But you said that there were different readings in different manuscripts. Why may not the alterations have been made by Unitarians; for I suppose some of the manuscripts were written by them, were they not?

Min. It is doubtful whether any now in existence were. During the dark ages, when most of the manuscripts now known were written, the holy Scriptures were in the keeping of Trinitarians, who certainly would not suffer them to be altered to favor views, which they deemed erroneous. Accordingly there is no evidence whatever of any change having been made in the manuscripts of the New Testament to favor the Unitarian scheme. This is a striking fact and merits serious consideration. Herbert Marsh, now a learned bishop of the church of England, and a Trinitarian, virtually admits that the danger is from the opposite side. "As," he remarks, "we have received our manuscripts of the Greek Testament, not out of the hands of ancient heretics, but from the Orthodox members of the Greek church, we have less reason to apprehend, that they have suffered in points of doctrine, from heretical influence."*

Mr W. I know not what to reply to this. I wish to think over what you have said by myself. The subject

* Marsh's Lectures Part I. p. 93.

is very important, and I wish to examine it very carefully before I draw my conclusions. But I have one question more to ask; what dependence can I place on the Bible, if it have been altered in the manner you say?

Min. The authority of the Bible is not weakened in the least in consequence of the corruptions which have been introduced into it. What is shown to be corrupt has no authority, and ought to have none. But this does not affect what remains, which rests on the most solid foundation. What I have said does not in the least affect the question, *Whether the Bible be the word of God?* but relates solely to this, *What properly belongs to the Bible?* If it can be shown, as I think it has been shown in the most convincing manner, that certain texts are spurious or corrupt, then it follows, most certainly, that those texts have no authority, and ought not to be quoted or used as parts of the Bible. But the Bible itself we may still regard with veneration and confidence, as a perfect rule of faith and practice.

Mr W. But how do I know that it has not been altered in many other places besides those you have mentioned? You said, if I remember right, that more than one hundred thousand various readings had been found in examining the different manuscripts of the New Testament alone.

Min. Yes; but at the same time we are assured that not one in a hundred of these affects the sense; and that the number is very small indeed of those which affect the doctrines of Christianity. It may be satisfactory to you to know that the five I have noticed are nearly all which have a bearing on important doctrines. And I

believe there is not one which seriously affects the moral precepts of the gospel.

Mr W. I am glad to have this assurance. It relieves me from much anxiety. I shall still be permitted to venerate my Bible, and to follow its heavenly guidance.

Min. Yes, my friend, it would be sad indeed to make shipwreck of faith in the pursuit of knowledge. But if our faith is a reasonable principle it will bear the closest examination. And we shall hold it with a firmer grasp and derive from it more important aids, when it has been proved and we know from examination that it rests on a broad and immovable foundation. I should think that every Christian would wish to know what does, and what does not belong to the Bible; and by that means, to obtain the Scriptures in as perfect a state as possible. It is ungenerous and unjust to charge a man with the guilt of altering the Bible or of undermining its authority, because he is anxious to remove from it any errors that have crept into it since the time it was written, and to bring it, as nearly as possible, to the state in which it was left by the sacred writers.

Mr W. I feel the force of your remark. You have taught me a useful lesson, which I trust I shall not soon forget — not to be hasty in passing judgment on the conduct of others, especially in regard to subjects which I do not understand. I sincerely thank you for your kindness and hope you will forgive the rashness and injustice of my censure.

Min. With all my heart. A sense of our common frailty should teach us both humility, and lead us to extend to others that charity which we must wish them to exercise towards us.

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ON

TESTS

OF

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TESTS OF TRUE RELIGION.

In the excited spirit of religious inquiry, which distinguishes the present age; at a time when many communities are shaken with the dying struggles of almost spent and exhausted errors, and the contest of parties is as violent as if, indeed, the mortal crisis were approaching; at a time, when the mingled cries of exultation, and anathema, and warning have risen up and filled the whole atmosphere of the church; I doubt not there are many, who, in the silence of their own hearts, and with the prayer of the agitated Saul, are devoutly saying, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' 'What wilt thou have me to believe? Shall I embrace this or that opinion? Shall I join myself with this or that class of Christains?' In short, What is true? What is right? What is agreeable to the divine will? — are questions, not only of deep import, but of pervading interest.

These questions, or this question rather, I propose to consider. And there is a reason for so doing, not only in the state of the general mind, but in the state of a few individual minds. It is a matter of great exultation, with the adherents of the popular religion, that here and there a man, of reputed Liberal views, has become Orthodox. It would seem, indeed, as if there was something like re-

ligious hallucination in this boasting: for it is an undeniable fact, that for every such change of opinions, ten men, at least, have left the ranks of Orthodoxy for a more Liberal system. How, otherwise, in fact, has the body of Liberal Christains been formed? Instances, in confirmation of this statement, are continually and unsought, coming to my knowledge. I recollect now a case, where, in the course of a year, and in a perfectly settled state of things, upon the mere strength of conviction, and at some pecuniary sacrifices, eleven families have left one Orthodox parish, and joined themselves to a single Unitarian society. The fact, however, was never trumpeted through the land, for it was not of such an extraordinary nature as to furnish occasion for any ado about it. It was never, that I know, published in a newspaper, and I hope it never will be.

Neither is it because I am at all concerned about such conversions to the Orthodox party, that I now refer to them. As I care less about the *census* of a party, than its *principles*, I am more than consoled by seeing that some good will be produced by this mixture of a few men who have attained Liberal views, with the Orthodox. I refer to them, therefore, for the sake of stating, that it is, in my judgment, from an erroneous estimate of the nature of true religion, from mistaken views of the proper tests of piety, that they have been led to this change in their opinions. What I design to suggest in this remark, I shall unfold in the following discussion of the question — What is true religion?

I may add, that whoever has observed the progress of religious opinions for the last ten years in this country, must be aware that this question has become one of a remarkably practical and spiritual character. Speculative

controversies seem to have passed by, with the many, and I doubt, indeed, whether they ever did very deeply interest the many — the many, I mean, of the *religious*. Inquiry seems now, at any rate, to have gone to the *elements* and *vital principles* of practical religion. And, indeed, it may be questioned whether half of our *speculative* differences do not proceed from different views of what religion is, in its elements and practical principles, of what it is, as it exists in the heart.

If this be true, it becomes doubly important to examine the question before us. I think, indeed, that those who undertake to enlighten others, cannot do a more important service than clearly to point out, and continually to hold up, the discriminations between a true and false religion. I must take leave to add, that the public mind in my apprehension, — though much has been written, and excellently written, on the subject — is by no means fully in possession of the merits of this question. It seems to me as yet to have been generally decided on very rash and hasty considerations. It is a singular fact, indeed that much less reference has been had to Scripture, in determining the nature of *religion itself*, than in settling its *disputed dogmas*. It was easier, no doubt, to deal with the polemics of Christianity (for the books are full of *them*) than to go into an accurate and deliberate consideration of the real spirit of our Saviour, as it was exhibited in the general strain of his language, and the general tenor of his conduct. We want the impartial and elaborate investigation, and the acute and discriminating eye of a Paley for this. How much easier is it to be a sort of scriptural gladiator, like Horsley, or Magee, fighting with texts and criticisms, and striving chiefly to beat down an adversary!

I have now laid before my readers the object and plan of the remarks I have to offer, and I shall endeavor, as briefly as I am able, to bring forward some of the considerations already adverted to, which bear upon the question, *What is true religion ?*

I. My first object — as I have stated — my first object under the head of this general inquiry, is to notice some of those popular tests, which appear to me superficial and unsatisfactory.

1. One of these tests is *seriousness* in religion. On this point, I would not be misunderstood for a moment. True religion, undoubtedly, is serious. But it cannot be distinguished from the false, by this attribute, because we know that a false religion may be serious too. I would, indeed, be serious in religion, but I would not, for that reason, conclude that I was right. A man may be as serious in an error, as in the truth ; as serious in a bad purpose, or feeling, as in a good one. For seriousness is nothing else but a certain intentness of mind, and a man is intent only because he is interested ; and will you say, that, because a man is interested about anything, therefore that thing is right ?

It is plain that there could not be a more superficial and unsatisfactory test than this. Every religion may claim it, and I am not sure but the worst religions may claim the most of it. It is certain that superstition, in all its forms, has been emphatically serious.

Neither can I allow — with the admonition which this general fact gives me — neither can I allow, that a *peculiar* seriousness is a remarkably good sign. The state of mind most natural to a good man, it seems to me, is cheerfulness ; a considerate, calm cheerfulness. And I must

regard it as very unfortunate, and, in fact, as no better than a relic of old superstition, that the devout and good man should have come to be currently and technically denominated a *serious* man. Far better were it to say of one, who has become religious, provided he *has* become *truly* so, — to say, he is now a *cheerful* and a *happy* man.

This test is sometimes presented under a different form. It is said, that the Church, the *body* of the serious, so called, is found, in almost every division of society, to be in favor of the Orthodox views of religion. And what does this prove? Why, that the devotees of a religion are more attached to it than others. The Church, so called, has *derived* its religion, such as it is, from Orthodox views. Of course, it prefers those views. But if this proves anything, every sect and class of religionists upon earth may claim the benefit of the argument. By this rule of judging, the religious seriousness of Jews, Mahometans and Pagans, will prove *their* religion to be right. I say, the Church, so called; for it seems to be thought by many, that the bare annexing of this name to a body of men, entitles them to be considered as the representatives and expounders of the system of christian faith and piety. But surely, it can require but a moment's reflection on the history of the church, to satisfy any man, that such a presumption is altogether unwarrantable. Take the case of the Reformation. Did the adherence of the body of priests, monks, and professors, to the Catholic religion, prove *that* religion to be right? Did the deep seriousness and awe, with which they undoubtedly regarded their religious observances, — I say, did this *seriousness* prove anything?

2. The next test which is commonly insisted on, is *great*

and *unusual feeling* about religion. Here again I must take the same precaution against being misapprehended. A truly religious man will feel, and he will feel as deeply as his mind is capable of feeling, on this momentous and infinite concern. But this is the discrimination. Because a man feels, and that ever so deeply, on religion, it does not follow that he feels rightly, or that the *sort* of religion he feels so much about, is the right or the best religion. The inquiry, let it be remembered, is not, whether a man has any religion. He who has no feeling about it, of course, has no religion. And he who possesses strong religious emotions, *is* religious in some sense. But the question is, which of two religions is most correct and pure? And what we say, is, that the degree of *feeling* is not the circumstance which must decide this question. In other words, the *degree* of any feeling is not the test of its purity.

Can it be necessary much to urge or to illustrate, so plain a position as this? Is a man's sensibility, then, the measure of his virtue? Are the best affections the most violent? Is that the best and purest character, necessarily, which has the most of excitement in it? Shall we reason so loosely as to confound a man's temperament with his worth and piety?

But make the comparison, now — since it is often brought to that, — between two great bodies of religionists. And suppose that there is less or more feeling in one than the other? Does that settle the claims of either to the purest form of religion? By this rule of judging, I say, that Christianity itself cannot stand. Without doubt, there have been forms of *Pagan* religion, so strange and awful, or so cruel and sanguinary as to have awakened

far more emotion than our own. Were they, therefore, truer? Let any of our christian sects, if they can, compare their zeal, or sensibility, with that of the pilgrims, and devotees, and victims of Heathen and Moslem faith.

There is another discrimination which I must offer, before leaving this topic. I make a distinction between passion and affection. Passion is irregular, tumultuous, violent, evanescent. Affection is habitual, calm, deep, abiding. Now take, for an example of the affections, the head of a family, a husband, a father, a man devoted to his family, a man of strong domestic attachments. He never says anything about them, perhaps; he does not often weep with the excess of his parental feelings; he makes no ado about them; but he goes on from day to day, and from week to week, through a regular course of careful and pains-taking business, to provide for those who are dear to him beyond expression. This, I say, is unquestionable affection; strong, deep, and constant. But you are aware that there is a counterpart to this picture. There is a man, who, through his habitual indolence and negligence, leaves his family to suffering, or, at least, to want and inconvenience, and yet he may give far stronger visible and direct demonstrations of feeling, at times; he may be, occasionally, fond to excess of those he professes to love; he may exhibit, now and then, all the signs of a superficial and factitious sensibility. This is passion. And it can require no casuistry in morals, to decide between these descriptions of character.

Now, I fear that much of what is called religious feeling in the community, is of this latter kind. There is much occasional and factitious feeling, but far less that is real and permanent. There is much feeling at church,

perhaps, — feeling which belongs to the place, which is of the church, local, ritual feeling, and if this is so very much to be desired, — to be desired, merely because it is feeling — you would find twice as much of it, if you were to cross the way, and enter the theatre. There is much extravagant and tumultuous excitement, tears, and groans and raptures; but it is quite another question, whether they who value these things so highly, are, in their religious feelings, wise and reasonable, charitable and kind, calm, gentle, pure, and heavenly. I allow that strong feelings, like *these*, *are* tests; but I cannot admit that strong feelings, of themselves, are decisive, till I examine them. I allow that strong feelings like these *are* tests, but I question whether these feelings are from their very nature, apt to be so strong, as emotions of uncharitableness, anger, pride, and self-complacency. As far as human nature has yet developed itself, at least, I fear it must be admitted, that the strongest passions in man are not the amiable passions, — at least, not the pure and the right passions, but the selfish, the self-complacent, and the revengeful. Besides, in the very nature of things, it may be doubted, I repeat, whether the right affections are likely to be attended with so much of strong and agitated emotion, as the wrong. What wonder is it, if the zeal of the bad passions, in this bad world, should often be greater than the zeal of the good? Or if 'the children of this world should be wiser than the children of light?' What wonder that uncharitableness should be a stronger feeling than candor, and confidence stronger than modesty? What wonder that denunciation and abuse should provoke a more powerfule motion, and require more powerful demonstrations, than urbanity and good will? In the one

case, I have only to sit still, and calmly wish my brother well; in the other, I must rise up, and beat him down, if I am able, and lay him prostrate at my feet. I have read enough of past history, I have lived long enough, and have seen enough, I confess, to make me stand in absolute distrust and doubt, of the presumed superior worth of excited and strong emotions. I should *expect* to find, in the worst religion, in the most narrow, severe, and bigoted religion, in the religion that flows from the most extravagant and soul harrowing creed, the most of what the world calls strong feeling. And yet, in my heart, I believe, that in the gentleness, and kindness, and warmth of pure christian affection, there is, after all, a deeper and à truer feeling.

3. In the third place, a zeal about the *ritual observances* of piety — observances, I mean, of prayers, sabbaths, &c, is urged as a test of true religion.

Much as these observances are to be valued, in the character of auxiliaries and aids to piety, all history shows that it will not do to erect them into *tests* of truth or true religion. Compare Paganism with Revealed Religion, Judaism with Christianity, Popery with Protestantism, the Church of England with Puritanism, and any contemporary sect with the society of Friends, and you have the points of the argument before you. The former, in every instance, had more zeal about ritual observances; the latter, though confessedly improving upon the former, had less. Have Heathens held a purer religion than the children of Heaven's *immediate* teaching? Was the Jew — was the Pharisee a holier man than the unostentatious, humble Christian? He *claimed* to be holier, I know, and said to others, 'stand by thyself,' — but *was* he so? Are the Catholics, again, a purer body than the

Protestants? Must the Puritans yield, in solemn and earnest piety, to the Churchmen, who persecuted them for their simplicity in the matter of ritual observances? Or need the Friends, I fearlessly add, yield to any sect?

I regret the necessity, which the defence of truth imposes on me, of going into this argument. The age does not want it. It is the tendency of this and of every more intellectual age — it is the tendency especially of the *intellect* of every age, to be indifferent about forms. The mind, as it advances, is apt to throw off these, as shackles; and it is liable from its imperfection to go too fast and too far in this. The progress of mind, in short, is a process of simplifying. It demands greater simplicity, in all its exhibitions — demands it not only in religion, but in manners, in taste, in style, in laws, in government, in everything.

In fine, I value the observances of piety. I would have them respected. I would have them far more earnestly and devoutly resorted to, than they have ever yet been. I would have reflecting men beware, lest by the abuse of these things, they be driven from the proper use of them. But so long as I remember the frequent prayers of Mahometans and Hindoos that leave ours altogether in the shade — so long as I remember the zealous sabbath-keeping of the Jews, I cannot admit that such observances are infallible tests of truth and piety. The total neglect of these things, would undoubtedly be a bad sign. But who, — i. e. what party, is guilty of such neglect? And who does not know, that, as in the case of our Saviour, the more liberal observances *may be* the 'heartier and more true?'

4. In the fourth place, *extraordinary sacrifices* and *enterprises* in religion, are commonly brought forward as tests of that which is true.

It is impossible, however much we might desire it, to survey this topic in the abstract. It is the argument oftenest adduced and most insisted on, in favor of the popular religion of this country. It is probably the main support of the popular confidence. Behold our Missionary Societies, our Sunday School Unions, our Benevolent Associations, our great Christian enterprises. Can the religion which gives birth to all these be wrong? Can it be other than the best? See how much we are doing, and how much we are denying ourselves for Christ. Can all this proceed from anything but the superior love of Christ? We might ask, what the boasting proceeds from; but that is not to our present purpose.

It is rather singular, we may however remark by the way, that the popular, the prevailing, the predominant, and powerful religion of the land should talk of its sacrifices. There are many, who can think nothing a sacrifice, but the giving of — that dearest of all things to them — MONEY. The standing forth, for conscience' sake, as the mark of general obloquy, the being shunned and vilified, the bearing of hard names and cruel insinuations, the loss of reputation among the great body of the people, and the wounds of private friendship, — all these things, in the common and worldly estimate, weigh as nothing in the balance with a few paltry items of dollars and cents!

But let this pass; we may observe in the first place, that the test just stated fails to establish anything, because *all* sects are engaged, more or less, in these very enterprises of christian benevolence.

But if it be said, that some sects do and sacrifice much more than others for their religion, then let me, in the second place, refer you to religionists who do and sacri-

fice still more than they, and whose claim to the truth, according to this argument, will be still better. What are all the Protestant Missions in the world, compared with what the Society of Jesuits have done and endured? A mere drop in the bucket. If the spirit of missions is the test of true religion, we must go back to the communion of the Catholic Church. I speak with no unfriendly feelings toward missions. I only oppose the unwarrantable inference that is deduced from them.

But further; on this ground of extraordinary exertions and sacrifices, we shall find still stronger competitors than the Jesuits. Let the whole body of our christian zealots of every name, be confronted with the Hindoo devotees, and we cannot stand before them. What can we show to compare with their ablutions, and purifications, and scrupulous rites, and reiterated prayers, and unnumbered austerities? What can we show to compare with the crushed victims of Juggernaut, with the horrid self-immolations on the funeral pile, with the cries of deserted age and helpless infancy, that rise along the banks of the Ganges? What, in fine, can we show to compare with that whole land of sacrifices, which has been measured over its entire extent with the prostrations of pilgrims, and whose luxuriant and beautiful groves hang out from their evergreen boughs, the withered and sunburnt skeletons of emaciated and expiring devotees.

Nay more, these religionists appeal to these very examples to support the claim of their own system to superiority. And on this ground, I repeat it, we cannot meet them. We are obliged to say, that there are other and better tests. We appeal to the intrinsic purity, to the interior principles of our religion. And we do rightly.

But I must add, as a distinct observation, that this

main and ultimate ground of judgment, is the very thing that is overlooked in all these popular tests of religion. These tests, it is obvious, are all circumstantial and conditional. They are circumstantial. They relate not to the essence of religion, but to its accidents and adjuncts. Any particular degrees of seriousness and feeling are not religion, though they may belong to it. And ritual observances are not religion, though they may assist it. And missions and associations are not religion, though they may proceed from it. These tests are all conditional, too. *If* a man's religion is right, then his seriousness, and feeling, and enterprise in its behalf, may be right. But this ultimate question, — are the man's notions of religion right? — is left untouched by these popular tests.

'It is good,' says the Apostle, 'to be zealously affected always,' — but in what? — '*in a good thing*.' And I wish that men would be more zealous than they are, a thousand fold more zealous, in the love of God, and in the love of one another. There is no danger here. These are the great, the absolute, the unquestionable commandments. But to be zealous about matters of form and circumstance, about creeds and systems, about questionable projects, and uncommanded services, — this is quite another thing. It may be well, and it may not be. It may be a good thing in its place, but let it not — let not this zeal, or seriousness, or sensibility, take the place of those great tests and evidences of piety which God has ordained, for our guidance.

II. From these views of the insufficiency of some of the popular tests of true religion, let us turn to the only true standard — the SCRIPTURES.

And here I cannot help asking — though I do not intend to pursue the inquiry — I cannot help asking, in a

broad view, where we are told in the Scriptures, that a man shall be known to be a Christian, by his extraordinary seriousness, by the strength of his feelings about religion, by his ritual observances, or his religious enterprises? Surely, the confidence with which these tests are brought forward, ought to have some scriptural warrant. It is not for the want, on this subject, of *specifications* in the Bible, for it is full of them. We hear much of alms-deeds and charities, of visiting the widow and fatherless in their affliction, of self-control and meekness, of a gentle demeanor, and a pure conduct. Time would fail me, to enumerate all the traits and qualifications that mark out and designate the good man. And yet from all these, the public mind is turned away, to certain things, questionable in themselves, and yet more questionable as they are brought to serve the purposes of sectarian competition. Can anything be more extraordinary — can anything more strikingly indicate the thorough, and yet, unconscious perversion and sectarian bias of the whole religious mind of the country, than this fact, that nineteen times out of twenty you shall hear these questionable things urged to show the superiority of the popular religion, and only the twentieth time, if even then, shall a word be said about the great, the obvious, the abundant principles of evidence that are scattered up and down through the New Testament?

But not to dwell upon this surprising inconsistency in those who call themselves Christians, I would desire of any one who would know what true religion is, to read the discourses of our Saviour, to take a deliberate survey of their general character and spirit, to observe also the example of this great Master, and to endeavor by all these means to make himself acquainted with 'the mind that was in Christ.' I think he will find it to be a mind

singularly sober, reasonable, and calm; remarkably free from all excesses and and ebullitions, remarkably free from all that, in these days, is called *excitement*. How impossible is it to conceive of one of the scenes of a modern revival, as passing in the presence and under the preaching of Jesus Christ! How certain do we feel that all these things would be rebuked in his presence! How often did he check the intemperate zeal and superstitious painstaking of his disciples! We always feel that *his* among them was the calm mind, the mind free from perturbation, cheerful, gentle, affectionate. All in him was natural. His feelings were never in a constrained posture. His mind was never distorted from its true proportion and reasonable bias. We cannot connect with him the idea of any extravagance.

I have spoken of the absence in him of what is commonly called excitement. Yet he who should approach the instructions of our Saviour, with a view to ascertain their spirit, could never feel that his was a cold or a stern mind. He was never, indeed, except in a few cases where his indignation at wickedness was awakened, or where his soul was 'exceeding sorrowful' in the anticipation of that bitter cup that was prepared for him — he was never, in the common use of that word, *excited*. But yet we are sure, on the other hand, that his feelings were as deep and powerful, as they were gentle and blameless. And when I know that all these emotions dwelt within him, and that without measure; when I know that thoughts and purposes of infinite magnitude and magnificence were revolved in his mind; that he was acting, and felt that he was acting for all men and for all ages; when I know, moreover, that he had in constant antici-

pation the bitter agony of his crucifixion; and when I see him yet self-possessed, sustained, calm, nay cheerful, gentle, and thoughtful of all around him, observant of circumstances, and natural and timely in every word and action, I cannot express the reverence I feel for such a character. I am ashamed of my zeal, my enthusiasm, and of whatever of my own, that I call feeling. It seems as if all my feelings, in the comparison, were but hasty passions, and all my thoughts, but wavering fancies. With such an example before me, I find, surely, nothing to boast of in my hasty impulses or my infirm sensibility. I can hear no more of the pretensions and confidences (founded on such qualities) of frail creatures like myself. I can see nothing for my guidance but this transcendent example.

I have spoken of the sobriety of our Saviour. I must be allowed to doubt whether this trait of his character has, by any means, been sufficiently considered, or considered in any proportion to its extraordinary nature and value. I am tempted to think that this is farther beyond us, than anything in his character which is designed for our imitation. I know what it is to be zealous and enthusiastic in religion. I know, alas! what it is to be too cold and indifferent. But do I know what it is to be sober? — to be as calm as if I were devoid of all impulse and emotion — to be as intensely moved as if my heart would break with its emotions — and yet, *to be sober*? There is a voice of moral power, a tone from the innermost recesses of the soul, a solemn, self-possessed, and commanding sobriety in our Saviour's teaching, which I know not whether any man has ever learned from him. I know not whether the purest *eloquence* in the Christian

Church does not altogether fall short of this. If we are delighted, fascinated, fixed in admiration, we are apt to think that this is enough; and the preacher who can produce this effect, is liable, perhaps, to think that this is enough. But I cannot conceive of those who listened to our Saviour, as going away merely delighted, as exclaiming about the *delightful* season they had had, as filled with glow and excitement. And yet they were *penetrated to the very heart*, and went away — yes, though they came as spies and enemies — they went away, saying, 'Never man spake like this man.'

I have now only adverted to that sort of inquiry, which I could wish might be pursued, into our Saviour's character, and the character of his teaching and religion: but the limits of this tract forbid my pursuing the subject into detail. This, I must desire the reader, most carefully and candidly, to do for himself. He will find that it is no common inquiry. Let him lay aside, for a time, his controversial zeal about texts, and doctrines, and offices, and simply ask — *what sort of a religion, a piety, was Jesus Christ's?* I leave the inquiry; and could wish that every reader would peruse the Gospels, with this single question before him. And when he has risen from this perusal, I would ask him to say, whether he believes that Jesus Christ would have awarded the character of the good man as exclusively as is now done, to the most *solemn*, to the most *zealous*, to the most *scrupulous in ritual observances*, or to the most *active in public and ostentatious religious enterprises*. I will only add that this is the legitimate and the great inquiry, because our Saviour's teaching is the authorized exhibition of religion—because our Saviour's character is religion embodied in an example.

One further remark. I have not engaged in this dis-

cussion, because I apprehend that those who read it, or that any others, are liable to be, in the just sense of those words, too strict, or too serious or earnest, or too active in the public duties of christian benevolence. And I believe, indeed, that the truest severity and rigor of virtue, are perfectly compatible with the truest cheerfulness and freedom of mind. It is not, then, that I consider any too strict, or that I would make any less so. This is not the point at which I aim. This is not the point in hand. The question is, *What evidence does the predominance of any particular qualities in a religion give, that that religion is the truest and the best?* And when, leaving the wide and obvious path of the christian virtues — when, forsaking the broad and beaten ground of evidence, men undertake to set up certain doubtful qualities and actions, as the main tests of true religion — when they urge them so boldly and so constantly as to put the reasonable, but diffident and timid in doubt, it is time to speak — both for their protection, and for the defence of truth.

Let it be your endeavor, reader! and mine, not only to speak the words of truth and soberness, but to act in accordance with the words we speak. Let it be our endeavor, and may it be our happiness and honor, to show that men can be serious without gloom, earnest without noisy excitement, and devout and active without saying, 'Come and see my zeal for the Lord.' May we be found faithful to our Bible — faithful to God — and faithful to the duties of our present and passing lot! I ask no more than this, and *I ask no less.* And in this, I pray God, that we may be found 'steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord!'

No. 18.

ON

THE EVIDENCE

NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH

THE

DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

Samuel C [illegible]

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The following Dissertation was written by the late Rev. S. C. Thacher, and was originally published as an appendix to the American edition of Yates' reply to Wardlaw It may also be found at the end of the volume of Mr Thacher's Sermons printed after his death. Its merits entitle it to general perusal. It is therefore published as a tract, that it may be read by those who might see neither of the books in which it has hitherto appeared.

BOSTON,
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A DISSERTATION,

On the kind and degree of Evidence necessary to establish the Doctrine of the Trinity, and by which we might expect the Doctrine of the Trinity would be supported in the Scriptures.

It will easily be acknowledged, that in all inquiries which depend on moral evidence, the correctness of our conclusions will be very much affected by the standard of proof by which we try them. If this standard be either too high or too low, if we require either too much or too little evidence, we may disbelieve where we ought to be convinced, or be convinced where we ought to disbelieve. The sceptic, who demands a kind and degree of proof inconsistent with our moral nature, our state of probation, and the analogy of the divine government, is led to throw away the inestimable aids, and motives, and consolations, and hopes of Christianity. The believer in transubstantiation, on the other hand, who is satisfied with evidence insufficient both in its measure and its nature, is led to embrace a faith, which makes the gospel itself incredible, by making it responsible for a doctrine contradictory to nature, to reason, and to other parts of the scriptures themselves. It is evidently very important, therefore, that we should guard against the danger of requiring too much, or of being contented with too little

proof of our religious opinions. For this reason it seems to be proper, that one, who has never critically examined the proofs of the doctrine of the Trinity, should inquire, by what sort of evidence we may justly expect such a doctrine would be accompanied.

A doctrine may, *a priori*, or previously to a minute inquiry into its proofs, have a presumption either in its favor, or against it. A proposition which is at once perceived to be consonant to reason and the general tenor of the scriptures, will have a previous presumption *in its favor*, and may be believed to be a true doctrine of Christianity, with little hesitation. On the contrary, a proposition, which is apparently both irrational and unscriptural, will have a previous presumption *against it*, and requires a more scrupulous examination, and a fuller and more unequivocal evidence, before it can be embraced. There is a previous probability, for example, that the doctrine of a providence will be found in the New Testament, and a previous improbability, that the doctrine of transubstantiation will be found there.

In applying this general principle, we may safely say, that there is a strong presumption that the scriptures will not be found to contain any doctrine apparently inconsistent with the unity of God. There is no truth of greater clearness and higher authority, than that there is but one God. Both philosophy and revelation unite in confirming it. The systematical unity and harmony of design conspicuous throughout the universe, extending to the moral as well as the physical world, lead us to the conclusion that the cause of all is One. All the arguments, which demonstrate the existence of God, lead us to the same conclusion. They all result in this, that the nonexistence of an infinite, original, eternal mind, implies

an absurdity, a contradiction, an impossibility. But this reasoning can hold of only one such mind. For, since one such mind is adequate to every effect, if it could be maintained that more than one could exist, it might be said of *each* of them, separately, that its nonexistence is possible; and necessary existence, therefore, could be proved of *neither* of them. That therefore, which is the essence of every argument for the being of a God, would lose all its force, and atheism would be established on the ruins of all religion. But, indeed, the existence of one *infinite* mind excludes, by the very definition of infinity, the possibility that there should be more than one. If we attempt to form the supposition of a second infinite Being, we at once see, that it must in every particular be entirely coincident with the first; that is to say, as to all our ideas, it will necessarily be one and the same.

To this great truth, that there is but one God, both the Jewish and Christian revelations lend all the weight of their divine authority. Nothing can be more full and express than their testimony to this point. It was the great object of Judaism to preserve this truth amidst the polytheism of the ancient world. So sacred was it esteemed by the Jews, that it was a custom of theirs even till modern times, to repeat every morning and evening the passage of Deuteronomy; HEAR, O ISRAEL, JEHOVAH OUR GOD, JEHOVAH IS ONE. It is needless, however, to multiply proofs of this point, since it is one of those primary principles, which are universally admitted. All Christians, of every name, with whatever inconsistency it may sometimes be done, are compelled by the force of scripture testimony to acknowledge, that there is one God, and that there is none other, but He. We are authorized by this universal concession to take this doc-

trine as an axiom in all our reasonings on this subject, and to say, that whatever else may be false, this must be true.

As therefore the unity of God stands on the highest possible evidence, we are sure, that all other truths of religion will be *really* consistent with it, and of course there is a high probability that they will all be *apparently* consistent with it. We ought to view every proposition, which seems to contradict it, with doubt and suspicion; for we are certain, that such a proposition must either be false, or else that we do not understand it. We are justified therefore in saying, that there is, *a priori*, a strong presumption against any proposition which apparently interferes with the doctrine of the unity of God. We do not say that this presumption is so strong that no evidence can remove it. But we must all admit, that till the compatibility of such a doctrine with this primary truth is rendered manifest, everything must be presumed against it, and nothing in its favor.

Now, there is scarcely any one who will deny that the doctrine of the trinity is *apparently* inconsistent with the unity of God. There is strong *apparent* discordance, we must all own, between the two propositions, that God is one, and that God is three. It is not till after many subtile and metaphysical distinctions are made, that any one will pretend that the harmony and consistency between them become visible. This is true of all the technical statements of this doctrine which has ever been given. They have undergone many changes since the doctrine of the trinity was finally completed, towards the close of the fourth century; but the same essential difficulty still adheres to them all. It must always be affirmed, under some form or other, by every believer in a trinity in unity,

that *three*, in some sense or other, *are one*, and *one is three*. It is true, that while any term of the proposition is declared to be mysterious, ineffable, and indefinable, it is impossible to demonstrate that it affirms a contradiction. We only say of it that it is *apparently* inconsistent with the doctrine of the unity of God in the natural and plain meaning of words. We say only, that if it mean anything like what such words *would* mean in any other proposition, it means something, between which, and the assertion that three Gods are one God, it is *difficult* to discern a difference.

The *apparent* inconsistency of the doctrine of the trinity with the unity of God becomes much stronger, when we examine the *practical* statements that are given of it. In speaking of its theory, its advocates secure themselves from attack by declining to say *what they mean*, and calling that a mystery which might otherwise seem to be a contradiction. "Unless we have *some notion of* the thing itself," one of them exultingly asks, "on what principle can we possibly make out its contrariety to reason." But the case is different in the practical statements of the doctrine of the trinity. When the proposition is entire, and the contradiction would appear manifest if words were allowed to bear any distinct meaning, its friends protest, that they use the word "person" only "for want of a better word," and declare, that we have no definite conception in what sense it is to be understood. But when they speak of the "persons" *separately*, their difficulties seem all to vanish. They ascribe severally to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, all that goes to make up our ideas of three perfectly distinct Gods. Each has a different name; different agencies or offices; distinct and independent power; and above all, each is a distinct

object of supreme worship and adoration. Of the Father, it may be said, that He is the infinite, eternal, self-existent God: of the Son it may be said, that He is the infinite, eternal, self-existent God: of the Holy Ghost it may be said, that He is the infinite, eternal, self-existent God. It is expressly declared, that these are not merely different *names* or different *modes* of operation of the same person. The pronouns I, thou, he, may be used as freely of each of these different "subsistences," as they may be of three different men. Now all we say of this doctrine, which applies the name and attributes of God to three distinct and independent agents, is, that to a common mind there is in it an *apparent* inconsistency, a *seeming* incompatibility with the doctrine that there is One God and none other but He. The most zealous Trinitarian must admit, that if the same proposition were found in the Hindu Mythology, we should take it, till better informed, for something very much resembling a contradiction.

The use we make of these facts and reasonings is, not to say that the doctrine of the Trinity *cannot* be found in the scriptures, but simply that we should not *expect* it to be found there. There is a very high probability, a strong previous presumption, that it will not be found there. A student of the Bible is bound to take it for granted, that it is not there, till it is proved that it undoubtedly is; he must conclude it to be false, till it is fully and clearly demonstrated to be true. Everything must be presumed against its evidence, and nothing in its favor. It will prove nothing for such a doctrine, that passages can be produced, which may possibly mean something like it, unless it can be unequivocally shown, that they *cannot possibly mean anything else.* We must all sit down to the study of the scriptures as Unitarians; and nothing

but their clear and decisive testimony ought to make us Trinitarians.

We have suggested, that in proportion as the previous presumption against any doctrine is strong, the evidence by which this presumption is to be set aside, may be justly expected to be correspondently abundant and clear. This expectation is heightened, in proportion as the sources, from which the evidence is drawn, are fewer and narrower. In a case like that of the Trinity, where the doctrine is acknowledged to be of the highest importance, and where the scripture testimony is the only medium of proof, we may certainly look for the utmost plainness and directness in every proposition relating to the subject. The presumption against the doctrine of the Trinity, and the consequent necessity of an increase of proof to remove it, become stronger when it is considered, that this doctrine, if proved at all, must be *proved from the New Testament alone;* as we shall now attempt to show.

I am aware, that there is a small number of passages in the Old Testament, in which it is thought some allusions are found to a plurality in the divine nature. If these passages alone, however, were all the support of the doctrine of the Trinity, I imagine none would think them of great weight. No one will say, that a reader of the Old Testament *merely*, would find there any revelation of three distinct objects of supreme religious worship. He would find nothing from which he could infer, that Jesus Christ is the supreme, self-existent God, the Father of Jesus Christ also the supreme, self-existent God, and a Holy Spirit proceeding from them both, also the supreme, self-existent God. We may think, that *after* this doctrine has been clearly discovered in the New Testament, we may find allusions to it in the Old. But no one,

I am confident, will affirm, that a reader of the Old Tesment *merely, at the present day*, would find there any mention of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the connexion in which they are now used.

It is generally acknowledged, that this was in fact the state of mind of the great body of the Jewish nation, at the time of the appearing of our Lord. It has indeed been very laboriously attempted to be shown, that vestiges of something like a doctrine of the trinity are to be found in the faith of the ancient Jewish Church. But it is conceded by Basnage, and even by Allix and Jamieson, that if this idea had ever been entertained, it was lost among the mass of the Jews whom our Lord addressed. Whether right or wrong, they were beyond all question wholly unsuspicious of any modification of the divine unity. Still, however, our argument admits of taking a less broad position; and to avoid all possibility of cavil, we shall simply say, that at the time of the introduction of the gospel, it was wholly unknown to any human being, that worship is to be addressed to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Let it now be considered, with what kind and what degree of evidence we are to expect this doctrine would be unfolded in the New Testament. A doctrine of great magnitude was to be disclosed, against which there would justly arise, at first view, in the mind of every believer in the unity of God, a very strong presumption. It was not a truth of natural religion which was simply to be republished and confirmed; but a truth was to be revealed in apparent contradiction to natural religion. The Jews, too, we must remember, had been accustomed to the greatest solemnity in everything which related to the great and only object of worship. It was from the "awful

top," and amidst the terrors of Sinai, that God declared to them, "I AM the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other Gods before ME." A most important modification of this commandment was now to be made. Two entirely new objects* of worship were to be revealed, and the first commandment was now to be so far changed, as to run more correctly thus: WE are the *Lord thy Gods.* Thou shalt have no other Gods before US. Let those, who deem so highly of the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, who make it the basis of the gospel, who believe there is no Christianity without it, who think that all the best hopes of man depend on its truth, —let these persons say, with what clearness and what solemnity we might expect such a doctrine to be revealed?

Might we not expect, that our Lord himself, would at least *once*, have stated the doctrine of the Trinity in express language, and have insisted on the importance and necessity of believing it. Would he not, at least once, have declared formally and explicitly, that the first commandment was no longer to be understood in its plain and literal meaning; the meaning in which all his hearers had been accustomed to understand it? The word *God* occurs nearly *thirteen hundred times* in the New Testament, and might we not suppose, that, in some one of these passages, we should be expressly told, that the term is meant to include, not simply *one*, but *three* persons or subsistences, to each of which that title is applicable?

* No Trinitarian can object to this statement of their doctrine as teaching three distinct and supreme objects of worship. They certainly do represent our Lord to be as much an object of prayer and adoration, as God his Father. Indeed, if the three constituents of the Trinity are three distinct objects of thought, they are also three distinct objects of worship. If they are not distinct objects of thought, how absurd it is to pretend to speak of what we cannot even think!

If, in every instance where this word is used alone, it implies a plurality in the divine nature, should we be unable to find one solitary example of the application of plural pronouns in the whole New Testament? Would neither our Lord nor any one of his Apostles, have left a single sentence, in which the whole doctrine of the Trinity can be fully and accurately expressed? Should we expect to find no care to make accurate and evident distinctions between the doctrine of a Trinity and the dangerous Polytheistical notions of the heathens? The doctrine of the unity of God is more than once introduced in the New Testament and laid down most clearly and solemnly. Our Lord himself repeats these most impressive words to the Scribes. The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." Now, could we have supposed, that, as our Saviour knew this would be construed by all his hearers as teaching, that there is only one object of supreme worship, he would have omitted such an occasion as this of declaring, that in truth there are three? Could we have supposed, that since a principal argument for the Trinity, from the Old Testament, rests on the plural form of the Hebrew word for God, the Evangelist should have chosen to destroy this argument, by using the singular Greek noun which all know it is impossible should be translated otherwise than simply God?

If it should be said, that there might be reasons why our Lord did not *publicly* teach this doctrine, should we not expect some account of his *private* communications of it to his *disciples?* Would they have preserved no record of their first knowledge of a truth so wonderful, and so essential a part of the christian system? If we can suppose that our Saviour himself forbore to teach publicly that, which was in fact, the great principle on

which his whole gospel turned, why this reserve in his disciples? The gospels were not written till several years after his death, and many of the epistles still later; and should we have expected, that they would not have given a hint of the time or the circumstances, when this stupendous truth was unfolded to them? Observe in the Acts, how minutely and fully the manner is declared, in which the doctrine of the extension of Christianity to the Gentiles was unfolded. And could we have thought, that the first revelation of the so much more difficult and so much more incredible doctrine of the Trinity, would not have occupied a single line of the sacred history?

But if all these expectations were groundless; if it were necessary, that such a doctrine, though it must be learned from scripture alone, should yet never once be fully and plainly declared in the scriptures; if we could suppose, that it would only be dropped incidentally, and be left to us to collect, and put together, from a few fragments of discourse thinly scattered through the sacred volume; if we could suppose, that not only whole chapters, but whole books, should exist without the smallest allusion to that which is the key-stone of the whole gospel; if all this were no more than was to be expected, still, could we believe that the New Testament should contain anything *contradictory* to this doctrine? Could we have supposed, that there should be TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY PASSAGES in the New Testament from which our Saviour's *subordination* to the Father may be deduced; and not less than FOUR HUNDRED AND FORTY passages in which the Father is so mentioned, as to lead to the conclusion that he is exclusively the supreme God? We may easily account, on the Unitarian hypothesis, for many very strong and elevated

epithets ascribed to our Saviour, a Being so dignified in himself, so perfect in his character, so great in his office, and now so highly exalted by his God. But what account can be given of passages, which contain the most express and formal *contradiction* of the equality of Jesus with God? Or, if this for any inconceivable reason was necessary, at least should we not expect, that the manner in which the contradiction was to be reconciled would be explained or hinted at? If we were reasoning on any other subject, we should say, that one such passage as this, "My Father is greater than I," introduced with nothing to explain or limit it, would set aside a thousand mere *inferences* of *ours* in favor of a doctrine, which contradicts this truth. They who can believe, that, although it was the express design of St John in his Gospel to supply the deficiencies of the other Evangelists with regard to the Trinity,* he would yet set down without a word of caution or comment such passages as these, "I came from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of *him that sent me;*" "My doctrine is *not mine*, but his that sent me;" "The Father, which sent me, gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak;" "The Father, *that dwelleth* in me, he doeth the works;" "FOR THE FATHER IS GREATER THAN I;" "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, THE ONLY TRUE GOD, and Jesus Christ *whom thou hast sent*"—they, I say, who can believe, that these and other similar passages would be set down by a Trinitarian, in the act of proving his doctrine, with no word connected with them to restrain their natu-

* This idea has been maintained by Trinitarians, notwithstanding the Evangelist expressly tells us: "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus *is the Christ the son of the living God*, and that believing ye might have life through his name.'

ral import, ought at least to be more sparing of their charges on others of want of reverence for the scriptures.

These expectations with regard to the kind and degree of evidence which we might have expected to find in the New Testament for the doctrine of the Trinity, are not only intrinsically reasonable, but conform to the analogy of the scriptures themselves. The doctrine of *immortal life* is in some respects under similar circumstances with that of the Trinity. Neither of them is expressly taught in the Old Testament; though it is thought that there are allusions to both. Moses, however, as he never taught the Hebrews, that there are more objects of worship than one, so he never employed a future life as the sanction of any of his laws. So far there is an agreement in the circumstances of the two doctrines. In all other respects, that of the trinity is by far the stronger case, and would seem to require a much fuller and clearer revelation. The doctrine of immortality is one, which, if not domonstrable from the light of nature alone, certainly has many most powerful arguments in its favor. Bishop Butler has finely shown, that there is nothing in the fact or circumstances of death, which furnishes any presumption against its truth. We know it also as a historical fact, that it was the belief of the great body of the Jewish nation at the time of our Saviour's advent. The Pharisees who embraced it were the ruling party. All these are circumstances which would seem to diminish the necessity of a very full, formal, and frequent recognition of the doctrine in the New Testament.

But how stands the fact? This doctrine, which is really a fundamental, is treated as such throughout the New Testament. It shines everywhere in heaven's own light. It fell constantly from the lips of our Lord. It is asserted and reiterated by every one of his apostles. It

is interwoven into the whole texture of Christianity. If then such plenary proof is afforded to a doctrine, which reason, instinct, the tradition of the earliest antiquity, and every good feeling of the human heart, all dispose us to embrace, what evidence may we not justly expect for such a doctrine as the Trinity? The previous presumption is all *against* this opinion, as much as it is *in favor* of the doctrine of immortality. Up to this very day, its advocates have been unable fully and fairly to state it in any language, in which terms have a known and definite meaning, without involving an assertion of three Gods, or else an express and manifest contradiction. We have a right to expect, therefore, that this difficulty will be removed in the scripture, and that all we are to believe on this subject will there be expressed in plain and intelligible language. It is from this source alone, we are to remember, that we are to gather all our ideas on this subject. This high and awful mystery lies wholly within the province of revelation. How strong and clear, then, will be the light which will be shed on it in the sacred volume, if it be indeed a truth, and especially a fundamental truth of Christianity! How much stronger and clearer than that which is thrown on the doctrine of immortal life!

I have thus attempted to state some preliminary considerations, which ought to be kept in view by every one who is about to examine the New Testament on the subject of the Trinity. It is believed to be utterly impossible, that a man of a sound mind, who carries with him to the scriptures just views of the evidence which this doctrine demands, or may be expected to possess, can receive it as a part of the gospel, especially as a truth essential to salvation.

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THE

APOSTLE PAUL

A UNITARIAN.

SECOND EDITION.

PRINTED FOR THE

American Unitarian Association.

BOSTON,
GRAY AND BOWEN, 141 WASHINGTON STREET.
1832.

Price 5 Cents.

THE APOSTLE PAUL A UNITARIAN.

'I KEPT back nothing that was profitable unto you.' 'I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.'* These passages exhibit the manly and fearless principles on which Paul acted as a minister of Jesus Christ. The great talents, extended learning, and ardent zeal with which he went forward in the perilous way where duty called him, give him a claim to the first rank among the inspired apostles of our Saviour. We have no doubt that he was eminently faithful to his great trust. We may receive his testimony respecting the character and office of Jesus Christ, with entire confidence that it could not have been erroneous or defective in any important respect.

There are two senses in which Christ is said to be divine. One class of Christians believe that he is the eternal, self-existing God — that he 'whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world,' is the same being who sent him — that he 'who had all power given him in heaven and on earth,' is the same God who gave him that power.

Another class of Christians, called Unitarians, believe in Jesus not as the Supreme God, but as one

* Acts xx. 20, 27.

'whom God hath highly exalted and made a Prince and a Saviour — head over all things to the church.' They call him a divine messenger; but it is a divinity derived from God. His precepts were the precepts of God — his wisdom the wisdom of God — his power the power of God. The Unitarian then believes in Jesus Christ as a subordinate agent or representative of God, invested by him with divine wisdom and power to save and bless mankind.

It is our object to show that Paul's views of our Saviour correspond with this statement — or in other words, that he was a Unitarian. And for this purpose, it is necessary to review his *preaching* and his *writings*.

I. Let us examine his *preaching*, as we find it recorded by Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles. At that time the Gospels containing our Saviour's history were not written. It was necessary therefore for preachers to relate this history, and inform their hearers distinctly who Jesus was, what he was, and what he had done, and taught, and suffered for man's salvation. Paul professes to disclose the whole truth, and 'keep back nothing profitable;' if therefore the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ is not formally stated in his preaching, there is a strong presumption that he did not believe it. But we need not rest on this presumption alone; it will be easy to show positive evidence that he regarded him as a subordinate agent. This apostle says, he became all things to all men; or, in modern phrase, he accommodated his instructions to the condition and prejudices of the people whom he addressed. He addressed the Jews, as a nation acquainted with the one true God. They had long be-

lieved, from their ancient prophets, that God would send a messenger for their deliverance, called the Messiah, or Anointed. But they had mistaken the meaning of the promises to which they trusted. They expected a prince in the pomp of earthly power, to wear an earthly crown, and deliver them, not from moral ruin and death, but from the yoke of the Romans, their foreign masters. They would gladly have welcomed Jesus as the Messiah, if he had promised to drive out his country's proud oppressors, raise the banner of independence, and reestablish the throne of David in its long departed grandeur. But they would not receive as the messenger of God, him who had refused to be their king, and blasted their fondest hopes. They rejected with bitter scorn the meek and lowly Jesus, whose kingdom was not of this world. They were still less likely to admit his claims after he had suffered an ignominious death.

It was necessary therefore for the apostle, when he preached to Jews, to accommodate his arguments to their peculiar state of mind. He explained to them the spiritual nature and design of our Saviour's office, and proved from their sacred books, that this very Jesus whom they had crucified, was no other than the promised Messiah.

His first preaching recorded in Acts ix. was directed solely to this point. At Damascus, 'he preached Christ in the synagogues, *that he is the Son of God*,' or the Messiah.* Again, 'he confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that *this is very Christ*'† — that is, the true Messiah whom they expected.

His next discourse to the Jews, of which we have any

* Acts ix. 20. † Acts ix. 22.

record, was at Antioch. He had the same object in view as before, and the author, Luke, gives an account of his method and course of argument.* After the reading of the Scriptures, he addresses them as the chosen people of God; gives a sketch of their history to show his peculiar care of their nation down to the time of David; then he says, 'of this man's seed hath *God*, according to his promise, *raised* unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.' He then proceeds with the history of Jesus, comparing it with the ancient Scriptures, to prove that he is the Messiah. 'When they had fulfilled all that was written of him they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre; but *God raised* him from the dead.'† The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is proved and powerfully urged as conclusive evidence, that he was the Messiah, long expected by the Jewish nation.

He finally adds, 'Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man (Jesus Christ) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified;' — believe what? that Christ is God? Nothing like it; but only the doctrine he had been teaching them, which, free as it is from Trinitarianism, he himself called the 'word of salvation.'

Such as we have stated was the train of reasoning, which, as far as we are informed, Paul always employed in preaching the gospel to the Israelites. It went to prove the simple proposition, that Jesus was the Messiah; or, what means the same thing in the Greek language, th Christ. After having embraced this great truth, they

* Acts xiii. 17 — 42. † Acts xiii. 29 — 37.

were Christians in faith; it remained only for them to become so in practical obedience to the gospel.

It is necessary now to consider what idea a Jew must have had of the Messiah, after Paul had thus explained his character and office, and proved from the Old Testament that Jesus of Nazareth was he. I have already stated the well known fact, that this people had expected in him a temporal prince and deliverer. After the apostle had exposed this error, what new idea did they form of him? This may be easily answered.

The term *Messiah* or *Christ* literally means, the anointed. It originated in an ancient practice of anointing with oil one who was set apart or consecrated to an office. Now it is perfectly well known that the Jews supposed that their expected deliverer, whom they called, by way of eminence, *the* Messiah, would receive and fulfil his high office under the authority of Jehovah. They looked forward to him as God's most distinguished messenger to them. They invested him with high titles as the Son of God. But no Jew ever for a moment supposed that the Most High himself would come down to earth in human form as the Messiah. When the apostle therefore proved to them, that they were not to expect a temporal prince, but a spiritual one, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the true and long expected Messiah, they could have received him only as a messenger or agent of God — not as the ever-living Jehovah, whom they had worshipped in the Holy of Holies. Paul knew that the Jewish converts to Christianity must regard our Saviour only as an agent, deriving his power and dignity from God; and he gives them no intimation that they were in an error. Nay, we

find him 'testifying both to the Jews and to the Greeks' that he had 'kept nothing back that was profitable to them, nor shunned to declare all the counsel of God.' But how could this be true if he had been commissioned to preach the doctrine of the Trinity? Would any Trinitarian preacher have thought that he had 'declared all the counsel of God,' if he had failed to inform his hearers that Jesus Christ was no other than God himself?

But Paul gives no intimation of such a doctrine; all he says is directly against it. He aims merely to establish two points — first, that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the promised Messiah — and second, that God had raised him from the dead by his own power. He reasons with the Jews on their own received opinions; his argument is as follows. You already believe from your sacred writings, that God will qualify and send for your deliverance, a personage called the Messiah, who will be obedient to his will, and as his representative accomplish his purposes of mercy. Now if you compare these promises, on which you rely, with the life, character, death and resurrection of Jesus, who was crucified at Jerusalem, you will be convinced that he is the true Messiah. He was no impostor, for God raised him from the dead, he did not suffer his 'holy one to see corruption.'*

Now had the Jews admitted fully all that Paul had told them, they were obviously as far as ever from believing that Jesus was the supreme God: the apostle knew that this must be the case, and yet he is willing to leave them in this state of mind. He not only does not tell them of

* Acts xiii. 37.

our Saviour's underived divinity; but all he does say is adapted to confirm them in the opposite belief. It is then certain, either that the inspired apostle did not believe that Jesus was God, or that he did not consider it profitable to state it to his hearers. If you choose the former alternative, you will of course adopt his opinions; if you prefer the latter, we may ask why many christian ministers are now reviled and denounced for not preaching a doctrine, which Paul did not think profitable ?

As the same remarks may be applied to all his preaching to the Jews, we will next examine his mode of addressing Gentiles, or Heathens. He had been preaching to the Jews in Athens,* when his doctrines excited the attention and curiosity of some philosophers of that city. We notice a curious mistake of these idolaters. They heard Paul preaching to the Jews, and some of them supposed that he was proclaiming two new deities, 'because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.'† To gratify their love of novelty, they conducted him to Mars' Hill, saying 'May we know what this new doctrine is, whereof thou spekest?' He then proceeds to give them a full development of christian truth. Indeed no faithful minister of the gospel could have neglected an opportunity so favorable. We may remark that his reasoning differs considerably from that which he thought proper to address to the Jews. He could not prove to these Heathens, from the *Scriptures*, thatJesus was the Messiah whom God was to sanctify and send into

* Acts xvii. † v. 18, 19.

the world; for they knew nothing of the Scriptures, nor of the one God whom they revealed. He was obliged to address them on principles of natural religion. He even quotes one of their own poets to support his argument, 'for we are also his offspring.'*

Having proved the existence of one Eternal God, Creator, Ruler, Father of the Universe, he proceeds to make a moral use of this great truth. He proclaims the certain judgment of a future life, as confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He does not tell these idolaters that the Supreme Deity, whose existence he has been proving, assumed a human form, and came into the world to be its Redeemer, Sovereign and Judge. No, his doctrine is as different as possible from this; he tells them that God overlooked the conduct of man when in darkness and ignorance,† 'but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by *that man whom he hath ordained*, whereof he hath given assurance, inasmuch as *he hath raised* him from the dead.'

This discourse on Mars' Hill must be considered as exhibiting Paul's views of the important doctrines of Christianity, because it was delivered to the Athenians at their express request for full information. And he could not fail of giving them this information without gross unfaithfulness to the cause, for which he was ever ready to encounter peril, suffering, and death. We shall see what he really taught on this occasion, and how per-

* Acts xvii. 28. † v. 30, 31.

fectly it accords with Unitarian preaching. He enforced the following great practical truths. 1. That there is one only true God, Creator and Ruler of all things. 2d. That this God now calls all men everywhere to repentance (or reformation) because, 3d. There is a future life of retribution, and God has appointed a day of judgment, for the world. 4th. He *has ordained a man*, and given him power and wisdom to judge in righteousness, or justice. And, 5th. He has raised this agent from the dead, to prove beyond a doubt, that he had a divine commission. These five propositions embody the whole substance of the apostle's sermon to the Athenians. The doctrine is pure Unitarianism. It is obviously impossible that his hearers could have inferred from this discourse that Jesus, whom God had ordained, and whom he had raised from the dead, was that God himself. The same remarks may be applied to every instance of his preaching as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The whole tenor of his discourse is to give glory to Jesus Christ as one whom 'God had highly exalted,' but not an intimation is given, that he believed him to be God himself.

The only apparent exception to this remark is found in Acts xx. 28. 'Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.' There is a mistake in the common version. By recurring to Griesbach's Greek Testament, which is received as the best authority both by Trinitarians and Unitarians, it will be seen that the word, God, is not found in the original; — it should read, 'to feed the church of the Lord,' a common appellation of our Saviour as 'head of the church.'

It may perhaps be said, that as we have only a part of Paul's preaching handed down to us, we are not authorized to infer with certainty that he was a Unitarian preacher. To this we may answer, we can judge of his sentiments only by what we have. What is lost can prove nothing. This is believed to be fair reasoning. We gather the opinions of Dwight or Buckminster from what remains of their discourses. Our Trinitarian brethren call every preacher a Unitarian, if he do not distinctly avow his belief in the supreme, underived divinity of Jesus Christ. They will not allow that any faithful minister could omit this doctrine in an exhibition of christian truth. We reason in the same way in this case. We have shown several occasions in which the inspired apostle would have felt himself obliged to declare that Jesus was the living God, had he believed him to be so. We appeal to his own powerful and impassioned descriptions of our Saviour, when it was his object to exalt him in the estimation of his hearers. He professes to declare the whole counsel of God, to explain fully the character and office of Jesus; yet his highest praise is, that he is the Messiah, 'whom God *hath appointed* to judge the world in righteousness — whom he *hath raised* from the dead — *made him* sit at his right hand, and *crowned him* with glory and honor.' Now, how is this reserve to be accounted for? If he did not preach Christ's supreme divinity to the Jews, who had never thought of him as God, nor to Gentiles, who had never thought of him at all, to whom should he have preached it? To whom should it ever be preached, if so many different times and occasions could not call it forth from this bold and powerful champion of the cross?

It is to God, the Father of the Universe, and to him only, that the apostle ascribes supreme and underived divinity. It is the reflected lustre of this divinity that shines in the face of his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased. The Father reigns on the throne of the universe, unrivalled, and alone, and from this eternal and fathomless fountain emanations of light, and wisdom, and power have descended, 'without measure' upon this chosen representative; so that in him 'dwells the fulness of the divinity.'

II. Having shown that Paul was a Unitarian in his *preaching*, we have reason for supposing that he was so in his *writings*. To prove this it will be necessary to take a brief notice of each Epistle. It will not be denied that this is a work of some difficulty; for even Peter says there are things in his brother Paul's writings, hard to be understood. The plain unequivocal proofs, however, that he was a Unitarian, are so very numerous, that the chief difficulty consists in making such a selection as can be reduced within proper limits.

In the second chapter of Romans, we find the following passage. 'In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ.'* The apostle here refers all judgment to God, *through* the agency of his Son. Compare this testimony, with that of our Saviour himself — 'the Father judgeth no man but *hath committed* all judgment unto the Son.'† If God has committed all judgment to the Son, it is obvious that the Son himself had not eternal and underived power of judging — therefore he is not the Omnipotent God — 'God has

* Rom. ii. 16. † John v. 22.

given him authority to execute judgment also, *because he* is the Son of man.'*

'Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him; for in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.'† The apostle here wishes to inspire confidence in the Saviour by showing that his life and divine commission are beyond the power of death; 'because he liveth unto God' — because his life is devoted to the purposes of God or is sustained by the power of God. He could not have used this argument, if he had believed Christ to be the everliving, self-existent God; for it plainly denies his self-existence. He would have said death hath no dominion over him, because he is Jehovah, who cannot die. Compare this with our Saviour's own assertion, 'as the Father has life in himself, so he *hath given* to the Son to have life in himself.'‡ If this assertion does not mean that God only is self-existent, and Christ derived his being from God, I see not that any explanation of it can be given. But it is not from a few texts only that Paul is proved to have written to the Romans as a Unitarian; evidence of the fact presents itself on every page of this Epistle. Such expressions as the following need no comment. 'I thank my God *through* Jesus Christ.' Rom. i. 8. 'Christ Jesus, *whom God hath set forth*.' iii. 25. 'We have peace with God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ.' v. 1. The grace of God * * * which is *by* one man, Jesus Christ.' v. 15. 'Christ was raised up from the dead *by* the glory of the *Father*.' vi. 4. 'Alive unto God *through* Jesus Christ

* John v. 27. † Rom. vi. 9, 10. ‡ John v. 26.

our Lord.' vi 11. 'The gift of God is eternal life *through* Jesus Christ our Lord.' vi. 23. 'I thank God *through* Jesus Christ our Lord.' vii 25. 'God *sending* his own Son.' &c. viii. 3. '*He* that *raised* up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies.' viii. 11. 'We are * * * heirs of God, and *joint heirs with Christ*.' viii. 17, 'Christ that *died*, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at *the right hand of God*.' viii. 34. 'That ye may * * * glorify God even the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ.' xv. 6. 'To God only wise be glory *through* Jesus Christ for ever.' xvi. 27.

In the Epistles to the Corinthians, we find the following testimonies. 'Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of *God is made* unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.'* 'And ye are Christ's and *Christ is God's*.'† 'And *God* hath both *raised up the Lord*' [Jesus,] 'and will also raise us up at the last day by his own power.'‡ Is it possible that St Paul could have made these assertions, if he had believed Christ to be the Omnipotent God? Here are three propositions, all false unless he is a dependent being. 1. God *made* him wisdom, &c — therefore these are not inherent attributes. 2. Christ belongs to God, he is his subject, his property — therefore not himself supreme. 3. God raised him from the dead by his own power, in the same manner as he will raise us — therefore Jesus is dependent on God for life itself.

If further testimonies were needed, we might quote many such passages as the following. 'I *thank my God* always on your behalf, for the grace of God which

* 1 Cor. i. 30. † iii. 23. ‡ vi. 14.

is given you *by* Jesus Christ.' 1 Cor. i. 4. 'The head of man is Christ, and the *head* of Christ is *God*.' xi. 3. 'We have testified of *God* that he *raised* up Christ.' xv. 15. 'Blessed be *God*, even the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ.' 2 Cor. i. 3. 'Thanks be unto *God*, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.' ii. 14. 'All things are of *God*, who hath reconciled us to himself *by* Jesus Christ.' v. 18. 'Though he was crucified through weakness, yet he *liveth by the power of God*.' xiii. 4. Such is the apostle's usual manner of distinguishing between God and Jesus Christ. The following passage is important in this inquiry on two accounts. 'And there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, (as there be gods many and lords many;) but *unto us* there is but one God, the Father, *of whom* are all things, and we in him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *by whom* are all things, and we by him.'* This shows that the term God is applied to beings inferior to Jehovah. But this is not all. If language has any meaning, it proves that God is one being, and Jesus Christ another being distinct from him. It also asserts that we are to regard God as the ultimate source, *from whom* all things flow; and Jesus Christ as the agent or channel of his favor, *through whom* all things flow.

The next passage which I shall quote is absolutely decisive of this question. 'Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all

* Cor. viii. 4, 5, 6.

authority and power; for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. * * * But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that He' [God] 'is excepted, who *did put* all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself *be subject* unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.'* This can scarcely require a comment. Here are two plain direct assertions, each sufficient to prove that Paul regarded our Saviour as a subordinate agent. 1. God put all things under him — that is, Jesus acted with delegated power. 2. The time is coming when he is to give up this delegated power. I am not aware of any argument which can render it credible, that the apostle should apply this language to Jehovah, 'whose dominion endureth for ever.' Let the Trinitarian seriously ask himself if he is not in a great error? If Jesus is the Almighty God, does he believe that he will ever give up his power and become a subject?

We come next to the Epistle to the Galatians. There is not a single word in it that favors the doctrine of Christ's supreme divinity. This is a remarkable fact, if the apostle was a Trinitarian. But more than this; there are several expressions in the Epistle which are utterly inconsistent with the belief that Jesus Christ is God. Of this character is the first verse, in which Christ is said to have been raised from the dead *by* '*God the Father.*' In the fourth verse he is represented as having given himself for our sins 'according to the *will of God and our Father*, to whom be glory for ever.' The seventh verse of the fourth chapter affirms of the Christian, that he is 'an heir of God *through* Christ.' Thus our Saviour is

* Cor. xv. 24 — 29.

uniformly spoken of as subordinate to God the Father. One other specimen from this Epistle will suffice. 'But ye received me as an angel of God — even as Jesus Christ.'* Angel is synonymous with messenger — and St Paul indirectly assigns that character to Jesus Christ. He certainly does not mean to say, ye received me as you would receive God — but you received me as the authorized ambassador of God — as Jesus Christ, who came to reveal his will and accomplish his designs.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is still more explicit. We cannot doubt that it was written by a Unitarian. —— 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, * * * according to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He *raised him* from the dead, *and set him* at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and *hath put* all things under his feet; and *gave him* to be the head over all things to the church.'† Let us look distinctly at the several propositions contained in this statement, and we shall find that Paul could not have regarded our Saviour as the supreme God. 1. The *God of our Lord* Jesus by his own power raised him from the dead. 2. *He set* him at his right hand, above all other created powers. 3. *He put* all things under him, *and made* him head over all things to the church. Thus he ascribes everything to God, and nothing to Jesus as an independent being. Now either the apostle did not believe him to be Jehovah, or these three propositions are utterly false; they cannot be ex-

* Gal. iv. 14. † Eph. i. 17—22.

plained away on any correct principle of interpretation; they are not stated once and heedlessly, but deliberately and often. While there is not a single sentence in the whole epistle that contradicts them, they find more or less support in every chapter. For instance. 'Blessed be the *God and Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Eph. i. 3. '*Through* him' [i. e. Christ] 'we both have access by one spirit unto the *Father*.' ii. 18. 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ.' iii. 14. 'One Lord, * * * *one God and Father of all*, who is *above all*, and through all, and in you all.' iv. 5, 6. 'Giving thanks always for all things *unto God and the Father* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.' v. 20. Who may dare, in view of such declarations, to affirm that Paul did not write to the Ephesians as a Unitarian?

The Epistle to the Philippians bears the same testimony. Would a writer who believed Jesus Christ to be God express himself as Paul has done in the following passages? 'The fruits of righteousness which are *by* Jesus Christ *unto the glory and praise* of God.' Phil. i. 11. 'For we * * * *worship God* in the spirit and *rejoice in Jesus Christ*.' iii. 3. '*My God* shall support all your need according to his riches in glory *by* Christ Jesus. Now unto *God and our Father* be glory for ever and ever, amen' iv. 19, 20. Such is the current language of this Epistle. It will not be pretended that there is more than one passage which even *seems* to have a contradictory import. We allude to the apostle's assertion that our Saviour 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God.' This has been considered a decisive proof of the Deity of Christ. We shall show that, taken according to the true

meaning of the original, and in connexion with the context, it is so far from affording any support to this doctrine, that it is an unanswerable argument in favor of Unitarian views of the subject. The whole passage follows. 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'* This passage, we maintain, taken together, plainy disproves the Deity of Christ. This will appear if we particularly attend to the separate propositions. 1. 'He was in the form of God.' This means either that he was in the similitude of God — God-like, as being a divine messenger — or that he was the visible representative of God on earth; it is, in either case, equivalent to 'the image of the invisible God,' therefore a being distinct from God. 2. God *highly exalted* him and *gave* him a name above every name. If Jesus Christ were God himself, he would not be capable of *being exalted* — he would by his own nature be above all creatures. If he were the supreme Jehovah, would it be true that '*God had given* him a name above every name?' Was he not eternally and independently above

* Phil. ii. 5 — 12.

all other beings? Would St Paul have thought it proper to refer his exaltation to God's favor? But what is more remarkable, 3. God is said to have exalted him as a reward for his obedience,* 'he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; *wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him, &c.' Jesus Christ then could be rewarded! as we are told in another place that '*for the joy* that was set before him, he endured the cross, &c.'† 4. Consider also the *end* for which God is said to have exalted him, above all his creatures. Was it that they might give the glory to Jesus as God? No, the apostle says otherwise — that at the name of Jesus, every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.' No evidence could be more positive than Paul regarded our Saviour, in his highest exaltation, as wholly dependent on God for his dignity and power. How, then, it will be asked, could Paul say of him, that he 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God?' We answer that Paul did not say this. His words in the original Greek do not necessarily convey any such meaning. The passage is incorrectly translated. This last remark is admitted to be true by Trinitarians themselves. We have the original before us, and perceive that the word rendered in our common version, 'equal, might at least as properly be translated *like*. It is often used to denote mere *resemblance*, both in the Scriptures and in the classics. And as to the phrase, he 'thought it not robbery,' we have the import of the original more exactly in the words, — he 'thought it not a thing to be eagerly retained.' Ac-

* See Phil. v. 8 and 9. † Heb. xii. 2.

cordingly, the passage may be correctly translated thus; —'who being in the form of God, did not think this likeness to God a thing to be eagerly retained, but humbled himself,' &c. We now see the relevancy of the apostle's argument, which was to enforce the duty of humility and benevolence by proposing the example of Christ. But to say that our Saviour 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God' could serve only to encourage an opposite spirit We perceive, also, a perfect agreement of this passage with the context, as well as with St Paul's other writings; whereas, according to the common version, it is at variance with them both. Besides, on the Trinitarian supposition that the apostle meant by these words to affirm that Christ is God, how can he be vindicated from the absurdity of saying of a being, *that he* thought it not robbery to be *equal with himself?* We are certain therefore from the whole passage, that St Paul regarded our Saviour as an agent dependent on God for his power and glory.

The Epistle to the Colossians begins with Paul's assertion that he is 'an apostle of Jesus Christ *by the will of God.*' In verse 12, of the first chapter, he gives 'thanks unto the *Father*,' who 'hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear *Son*' Then follows a glowing description of the true Messiah. It is the apostle's purpose to exalt him as an object of confidence and veneration. If then he had believed him to be God, he must have stated this conviction as the proper ground of reverence. He would not have represented, as he has done, the high claims of Jesus, as founded entirely on what God has done for him. Our Saviour is described in the fervent eloquence of St Paul, as the agent of God's

power, head of the church, first born from the dead, '*that in all things he might have* the preeminence.' Jesus then, according to this representation, was not God; he did not *naturally* and of *himself* have the preeminence, but it was bestowed upon him, 'because it *pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell.'*

Christ is said to have done, or created all things, by power delegated from God. It is evident then that he was not the supreme Creator; but there is some doubt what the apostle means by his having done or made all things. Some suppose that he existed in glory before the foundation of the world, and was the agent employed by God in the creation and support of all things in the material universe. Others offer good reasons for believing that the phrase 'all things' should be limited to *all things* done by the gospel dispensation for the spiritual new creation or moral renovation of mankind. Examples are found of such limitation of general or universal propositions. The following is exactly to the purpose — St John, addressing Christians, says to them, 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know *all things*.'† The writer obviously means that they know *all things* which Christians ought to know. So St Paul says, 'I can do *all things* through Christ which strengtheneth me.'

Our present inquiry however does not call for the discussion of this question. Whatever opinion is adopted, it is still equally clear that St Paul did not consider our Saviour as having underived power. For he speaks of '*God* who *raised* him from the dead.' Col. ii. 12. He represents Christ, not as supreme, but as 'sitting on the

* Col. i. 12 to 20. † 1 John ii. 20. ‡ Phil. iv. 13.

right hand of God.' iii. 1. He implies the inferiority of the Son to the Father in his injunction to Christians to 'do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks *to God the Father* by him.' iii. 17. When he approaches nearest to attributing to Christ the perfections of Deity, he refers to the Father as the source of all. Let the reader compare the following texts, 'For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily'* — 'For it *pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell.'† This is the doctrine of St Paul; the blessed Saviour is not a common man, as some philosophers have asserted — he is the Son and Messenger of God, with divine wisdom and power, 'for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the divinity.' He is not the Supreme God, as some Christians believe, 'for it *pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell.'‡

This conclusion is placed beyond a doubt by the following — 'Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature' or of all creatures.§ I have before explained the phrase, image of the invisible God, as necessarily signifying, a being distinct from God, the visible representative of his power and perfections on earth. 'The first born of all creatures' — this obviously places him first among created beings, but still one of them, who derived his being from God. Whether this means first in time, or first in dignity, or both, does not at all concern the present inquiry. In either sense, the passage cannot be reconciled with the eternal, un-

* Col. ii. 9. † Col. i. 19. § Col. i. 15.

‡ There is nothing in the original corresponding to the word *Father*, in this passage, yet the insertion of it by the translators is approved by the best Trinitarian commentators.

derived divinity of him who is called a creature by the inspired Apostle.

The two Epistles to the Thessalonians so fully authorize the same conclusion, that we need to notice only a single passage from each Epistle, to show that the Apostle speaks of God and Jesus as beings distinct from each other, not only while Christ was on earth, but after his ascension. 'Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the *living and true God*, and to wait for *his Son* from heaven, whom he *raised from the dead*, even *Jesus* which delivered us from the wrath to come.'* 'We are bound to give thanks always to *God* for you * * * because *God* hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, * * * whereunto *He* called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the *glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*.'†

The Epistles to Timothy were charges to a minister whom St Paul was peculiarly anxious to instruct as to 'rightly dividing the word of truth.' Let us observe some specimens of what he deemed to be this word of truth. 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the *only* wise *God*, be honor and glory forever.'‡ Was it to Jesus Christ that this ascription was made? Let the following passage afford an answer. 'For there is *one God* and *one Mediator between God and man*, the man *Christ Jesus*.'§ Again, 'I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things.'‖ Is not the Lord Jesus here represented as a distinct witness of conduct, as well as the angels? If then he is not a distinct *being* from God, what can this mean? Further, '*God*, who hath saved us, and

* 1 Thess. i. 9, 10. † 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 17.
§ 1 Tim. ii. 5. ‖ 1 Tim. v. 21.

called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to *his own purpose and grace*, which was given us in *Christ Jesus* before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.'* Christ, therefore, not being the original source of our salvation, is inferior to God. Once more. 'If we suffer with him' [i. e. Christ] 'we shall also reign with him.'† *Suffer with him — reign with him*; it would be impious for mere human beings to assert this of themseves in relation to one whom they regarded as the supreme God.

The Epistle to Titus was also a charge to a minister, whom the writer exhorted to adhere to 'sound doctrine.'‡ Does Paul address him in the manner of a Trinitarian? Far from it. He is careful to distinguish between God and Chr st as two beings. 'Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God, *and* our Saviour Jesus Christ.'§ The title, great God, is never applied to Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, but frequently to the Father, and to him alone. Again, 'God our Saviour, * * * according to *his own mercy*, saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy spirit, which he shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour.'‖ This is then the 'sound doctrine' of St Paul; — the 'Great God' is our Saviour, as the eternal source of mercy and love, and Jesus Christ is our Saviour in a subordinate sense, as the organ or channel *through which* this mercy flows to man.

The Epistle to Philemon, about a slave, who had been converted to Christianity by the preaching of Paul at

* 2 Tim. i. 8. 9, 10. † 2 Tim. ii. 12. ‡ Tit. ii. 1.
§ Tit. ii. 13. ‖ Tit. iii. 4—6.

Rome, contains nothing which relates to the subject of our present remarks.

We have now carefully examined the writings of Paul,* and find that they correspond with his preaching; they uniformly represent our Saviour as the anointed Messenger of God, exalted by him to be a Prince and a Saviour, but never as God himself. It remains to consider what may be said against this conclusion. There are two passages which require explanation, as they *seem* to contradict the general tenor of the apostle's writings. We shall find, however, that there is no real inconsistency.

We meet with one difficulty in the Epistle to the Romans. 'My kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption,' and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.'† A very slight addition, authorized by the original Greek, removes this difficulty, and renders the passage consistent with the rest of the Epistle. It might read, 'God be blessed for ever.' St Paul is here expressing his solicitude for his countrymen; and he relates God's providence and peculiar care over them, mentions the old and new covenants, and the promises made to the fathers. To this chosen nation, he says, belong the fathers from whom Christ descended, who is above all — over all — or better than all these other dispensations and persons, '*God be blessed* for ever.' This last clause accordingly is nothing more

* See Note at the end. † Rom. ix. 3, 4, 5.

than a natural expression of gratitude to God, for his best gift to man, — as he exclaims in another place, 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.' By adopting a different punctuation, however, which we are at liberty to do, since that of the common translation is of no authority, we may have, perhaps, a still more satisfactory interpretation of the passage. We may place a longer pause after the words 'Christ came;' then, by substituting, in the translation, *he who* for 'who,' which the original admits of, and inserting a comma after God, we shall have the passage thus: 'And of whom according to the flesh Christ came. He who is over all, God, be blessed for ever.' Or, by a freer version, the full meaning of the apostle, according to the opinion of some, may be given as follows: 'Of whom was Christ according to the flesh; he who was over all, being God blessed for ever.' Whichever construction be preferred, the Trinitarian mode of explaining the passage must we think be deemed false, since, besides other objections to it, it is a fact that those early fathers of the church who entertained the highest notions of the Saviour's character, and who, it must be supposed, understood the Greek language, never applied to Christ, even when most desirous to exalt him, the title of 'God over all blessed forever.'

The only other difficulty of this kind, is found in the following passage — 'Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.'* Even as the present version stands, the difficulty is only apparent. The second clause is a figurative expression, equivalent to 'Im-

* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

manuel,' God is with us. In this sense, we all believe that God was present, manifest to the world in his Son and ambassador Jesus Christ. It means no more than, that he is the 'image of the invisible God,' 'the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person,' and is equivalent to other expressions which mean the visible representative of God upon earth.

But we ought not to be satisfied with the common version of this text, for it is founded on an erroneous reading in the original.* The true reading is, 'Great is the mystery of godliness; *he*, *who* was manifest in the flesh, was justified by the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.' This is perfectly intelligible; the word God is not found in the original manuscripts, but has been designedly or accidentally introduced into the text. It is a triumphant exclamation of the apostle — Great is the mystery of man's regeneration from sin to holiness by the gospel; he who lived among us in human form, the representative of the divine character, and the messenger of the divine will, having accomplished the purposes of his mission, was received up by God into the bosom of his glory. We all believe, and we rejoice in believing this sublime truth; 'for if Christ is not risen,' says Paul, 'then our faith is vain, and your hope is vain.'

Our design is now accomplished. We have examined the thirteen Epistles of Paul, and have found them to bear positive evidence, that he regarded our Saviour as an agent who derived all his power and wisdom from God.

* See Griesbach's Greek Testament.

In eleven of these Epistles, and all his preaching, we do not find the least intimation that Jesus Christ is the self-existent Jehovah. And what can be opposed to this overpowering evidence? The whole opposite argument rests on one equivocal text in Romans, and another in Timothy, both of which, we have seen, can be easily explained, in harmony with the general tenor and spirit of his writings! If, then, we are ready to adopt the opinions of this eminent and inspired ambassador of Christ, whose writings and discourses occupy one third of the New Testament, we shall believe on our Saviour — not as a mere man, undertaking the reformation of the world with human genius and human power; we shall receive him as a divine teacher and master. We shall trust in him, as 'God's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased,' whom he has made the head of the church, 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,' in the gospel dispensation, his best gift to save and bless our lost race.

We are told that Unitarianism would deprive us of our Saviour; but it is not so. 'To us, there is one God, and one Lord Jesus Christ,' through whom living streams of light, and truth, and salvation have flowed, and shall forever flow from the eternal and exhaustless fountain of mercy. The great apostle of the Gentiles, in his triumphant visions of inspiration, wanted no higher assurance than 'that God had raised him from the dead.' He would not dim the glory of Jehovah's throne by interposing another object of supreme homage. And shall not we be satisfied with such a Saviour on whom 'God's spirit descended without measure?' The moral perfections of Deity, reflected in him, are pledged to fulfil his promises. The hopes of the gospel are firm as the

throne of heaven; for God himself has laid their deep foundations, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.

NOTE.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, has been omitted in this discussion, because there is not sufficient evidence that Paul was its author. Our limits will not allow an examination of its claims to be admitted among his writings. We may take, however, a brief notice of it, to show that its author, whoever he was, was certainly a Unitarian.

This Epistle is supposed to have been addressed to converts from Judaism to Christianity, to prevent their falling back into their old faith. So far as it is doctrinal, its design is to show that the religion of Christ is of higher authority and excellence than that of Moses. He proves the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and endeavors to exalt him as highly as possible in the estimation of his readers, by the three following considerations, each of which is illustrated and enforced with much learning and power.

1. That Jesus Christ was a divine messenger superior to the prophets of the old dispensation, or 'angels,' as they are called in the first chapter.

2. That he was superior to Moses, whom the Jewish converts regarded with great veneration.

3. That his priesthood was superior to the Levitical, inasmuch as the latter was ritual and temporary, while the former was spiritual and eternal.

It is evident that none but a Unitarian writer could have used these arguments, to prove the divine mission of our Saviour, and the divine origin of his religion.

One who believed that he was the Supreme God, would have stated, and endeavored to enforce this conviction as the true ground of confidence in him. If *that doctrine* had been established, every argument to prove the eternal Jehovah superior to angels or prophets, to Moses and Aaron, could be considered little less than impious. I do not know the man who is hardy enough to make such an irreverent comparison with the formality of argument.

It is then nearly demonstrated in the outset, that this writer regarded our Saviour as a messenger of God, with delegated authority. We need not therefore dwell long on particular passages.

In the first chapter, it will not affect the argument, whether we understand 'angels' as heavenly spirits or as messengers of God on earth. The connexion however seems to me to require us to understand *messengers* — the same prophets spoken of in the first verse. There is another reason for supposing that the 'prophets' and the 'angels' meant the same persons. The writer proves Christ's superiority to these 'angels,' and afterwards his superiority to Moses. This would have been at least needless, if the 'angels' had been supposed superior to Moses.

The meaning of the writer then is as follows, 'God spoke in ancient times by the prophets, but in these last days by his Son — a more exalted messenger, because God *has made* him heir of all things; superior to these former messengers, since he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.' That is, he is in a high and peculiar sense called his Son, while they are only servants.*

* Heb. i. 1 — 5.

Proceeding with the proofs of our Saviour's superiority, the writer says, 'When He bringeth his first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all these *messengers of God* (the angels, as it is in the common version,) worship him,'* or do him homage as a superior. The word translated worship often has this signification, implying not the worship due to God, but the reverence which we may properly pay to a superior in dignity or age. For instance, 'And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and *worshipped* the Lord and the *king*.'†

The writer next illustrates our Saviour's superiority to the former messengers of God in this striking manner — he represents the Almighty as saying to him, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom; thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; *therefore* God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.'‡

The use of the term God in an inferior sense is not uncommon in the Old Testament, from which this passage is quoted; and one instance has been before noticed in which it is so used in the New. It is employed to designate heathen deities, angels, princes, magistrates, and rulers.§ Its primitive signification is power. It is employed first to denote the eternal Source of all power, and secondly one who exercises delegated powers. Moses was to be a god to Aaron, because he was to be the organ of God's will to him. There is an instance in which wicked magistrates are called gods; 'I have said,

* Heb. i. 6. † 1 Chron. xxix. 20. ‡Heb. i. 8, 9.
§ Ex. xx. 23; xxii. 28, &c.

ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High; but ye shall die like men,' &c.*

In this qualified sense, the *name God* is employed in the following passage from the fortyfifth psalm, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.' This exalted praise is part of a coronation hymn, supposed to be addressed to Solomon. An earthly king is here called God, and his throne is said to be for ever and ever — an Oriental figure employed to express the permanence of his power. It may be well translated, 'Thy throne, O king, stands firm and secure.' Now this passage in the original psalm has no reference to Christ, and its being quoted afterwards in this manner, evidently could not give it any such reference; the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews merely accommodated what was first addressed to a Jewish prince to the praise of our Saviour, a prince greater than all earthly princes. It is obvious then, that the term God is here used in an inferior sense — because, as it was first applied to a temporal king, it would prove him to be the Almighty, as well as it could afterwards prove our Saviour to be so. But what follows is stillmore conclusive on this point — 'Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; *therefore God*, even *thy God*, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above *thy fellows*.' If Jesus had been the Supreme God, could he have had fellows, or equals? or could his righteousness be a subject of reward? This famous passage, then, which has been thought to support the deity of Jesus Christ, will, if fairly examined, and understood, be found to disprove the doctrine completely!

* Ps. lxxxii. 6, 7.

Again, the passage, which we have been considering represents our Saviour either as a subordinate agent, or as the Supreme Deity. If it does represent him as subordinate, the writer was certainly a Unitarian; if it represents him as Jehovah, it would be inconsistent in him to proceed next to prove that he was superior to Moses. Who ever thought that Moses was equal to God? What man in his senses could think it necessary to prove that God was superior to his servant?

Again, if the writer had understood that Jesus was God, it is evident he would not have employed so much learning and argument to prove that his priesthood was superior to that of Aaron and the Levites. If then we still maintain that this author believed in his supreme divinity, we must think him the most absurd and inconsequent of all reasoners — a conclusion which we shall by no means allow.

Numerous texts may be quoted in support of the inferences drawn in this note, but they cannot be necessary. Such evidence as we have already presented will not be resisted by any mind open to conviction. One more passage however will be noticed, because it has been misunderstood. 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.'* This must be taken in connexion with the main arguments of the Epistle, and its purpose, viz. to prevent the Jewish Christians from wavering in their faith. 'The priesthood of our Saviour is unchangeable — be ye therefore firm and constant in your adherence to his religion.' Or, 'Jesus Christ does not change,' 'he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, *therefore* be not carried about by divers and strange doctrines.'

* Heb. xiii. 9.

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ON THE

DOCTRINE OF TWO NATURES

IN

JESUS CHRIST.

By ALVAN LAMSON.

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THE present tract is, in part, a reprint of an article contributed by the author to the fifth volume of the "Unitarian Miscellany," and afterwards published in a separate form, and entitled "An Essay on the Doctrine of two Natures in Jesus Christ." The greater part has been rewritten, and some important arguments and illustrations added.

DOCTRINE OF TWO NATURES

IN

JESUS CHRIST.

The doctrine of the Trinity is embarrassed with numerous difficulties, and these difficulties multiply and strengthen, in proportion as its several parts and appendages are brought distinctly into view The hypothesis of two natures in Jesus Christ we deem one of its heaviest encumbrances. The trinity supposes the truth of this hypothesis; it may be said, in fact, to rest upon it as its basis, and with it must stand or fall. This circumstance has not, we fear, received the attention it deserves. It is true that the advocates for the strict and proper unity of the Divine Being, have occasionally argued from the absurdity of ascribing to an individual a finite and an infinite nature, but the argument has not been urged with due frequency and earnestness. For ourselves, we place great reliance upon it; it has a force, we think, which is not easily resisted; and could we bring no other, we should consider this alone sufficient to put the question of the truth or falsehood of opposite views at rest for ever.

Let us carefully weigh the doctrine of a double nature in Jesus Christ; let us see to what it amounts, and take a view of some of the chief objections to it. But first, let us glance at its origin and history in the early ages of the church.

We gather from ancient records, that the great bulk of plain unlettered believers, who derived their knowledge of Christianity from its first preachers and their immediate successors, viewed Jesus as a finite and dependent being. That this is true of the whole body of Jewish Christians, during their existence as a church, admits of no doubt. The *uneducated* Gentile converts, whose minds were not fettered by the prejudices of learning, partook of the same views. The doctrine of Christ's proper divinity appears to have encountered from them the sternest opposition; they dreaded it on account of its supposed impiety, thinking, that it infringed on the supremacy of the Father, and it was not till it had sustained severe and protracted struggles, that it finally obtained currency.

The *learned* converts from Paganism are entitled to the credit of introducing it. These converts, several of them at least, came fresh from the schools of Alexandria in Egypt, where they had become deeply imbued with the doctrines of the later Platonists, and on embracing Christianity took along with them the sentiments there imbibed. The consequence was, that as early as the former part of the second century, the religion of Jesus began to be corrupted, and its simple truths became disfigured, by an unnatural union with a speculative and earth-born philosophy.

Justin Martyr, A. D. 140, led the way by transferring

the Platonic doctrine of the divine reason (logos) to Christianity. This reason, originally considered an attribute of the Father, he converted into a proper person, making it to constitute the divine nature of Jesus. The first step having been taken, further innovations followed, and the work of corruption soon went on apace. It was aided in its progress by Clemens of Alexandria, A. D. 192, and especially by Origen, A. D. 230, a man of subtle and fervid genius, but of an extravagant imagination, and weak judgment, and a very prolific writer. The fame of Origen attracted numerous followers, who, afterwards dispersing into various parts, "everywhere," to use an expression of the learned Brucker, "sowed the field of God with tares."

The doctrine of the trinity, however, as explained by the Fathers of the first three centuries, we feel authorized to say, was very different from the modern orthodox doctrine. The perfect equality of the Son with the Father they never dreamed of asserting. Justin Martyr, as the complexion of his whole language testifies, evidently held the belief of his strict and proper inferiority; and such seems to have been the faith of all the christian writers of any celebrity before the Council of Nice, A. D. 325. It is unnecessary to adduce passages in corroboration of this statement, as its truth has been admitted by several learned trinitarians best acquainted with the writings of christian antiquity. Among those who have conceded it fully, or in substance, it is sufficient to mention the learned Jesuit Petavius, and Cudworth, the profound author of the "Intellectual System," both orthodox authorities.

The Fathers of the Council of Nice asserted the di-

vinity of the Son, but not his individual identity with the Father. He was *consubstantial*, as they expressed it, with the Father, that is, as they understood it, was in all respects similar, partook of the same *specific* nature, though not of the same *numerical essence;* as one man is of the same substance, or species, with another, though possessing distinct individuality. The Councils of Ephesus, A. D. 431, and Chalcedon, A. D. 451, occasioned by the controversies of the Nestorians and Eutychians, the former of whom were accused of dividing the person, and the latter of confounding the natures, of Jesus Christ, appear to have succeeded but little better than that of Nice in defining his divinity, though they undertook to determine the nature and results of its union with humanity. The Council of Chalcedon, particularly, claims the merit of having ascertained and settled the doctrine of the incarnation, which, according to its creed, is in substance as follows. *Jesus Christ is truly God and man, perfect in both natures, consubstantial with the Father with respect to his divinity, and consubstantial with us with respect to his humanity; the two natures, the divine and human, are indissolubly united in him without confusion or change, each retaining all its former attributes, yet so united as to form one person.*

The doctrine of the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ, as held by the orthodox of succeeding ages, and received by trinitarians of the present day, does not differ in any important particulars from that established by the council of Chalcedon, except, perhaps, that the term *consubstantial*, which the Fathers of that council, to preserve consistency, must have explained to mean only a *specific*, would be under-

stood by the moderns to express an individual or *numerical* identity.

Dr. Barrow, one of the most distinguished of the old English divines, thus expresses himself on the subject. "We may, with the holy Fathers, and particularly with the great council of Chalcedon, assert, that in the incarnation of our Lord, the two natures, the divine and human, were united, without any confusion or commixtion; for such a way of blending would induce a third nature different from both; such a commixtion being supposed, our Lord would be neither God nor man, but another third kind of substance, that would destroy, diminish, or alter the properties of each; which is unsound to say, and impossible to be; wherefore both natures in this mystery do subsist entire, distinct, and unconfused, each retaining its essential and natural properties."

After some further remarks of a similar character, he adds, "The natures were joined undividedly; — there is but one *Christ*, one person, to whom, being God, and being man, are truly and properly attributed."

"The same person never ceased to be both God and man; not even then, when our Lord as man did undergo death; for he raised himself from the dead, he reared the temple of his own body, being fallen; as being God, he was able to raise himself, as being man, he was capable of being raised by himself; the union between God and man persisting, when the union between human body and soul was dissolved." *

The church of England, following in the steps of the unreformed Catholic church, determines that, "the Son — took man's nature — so that two whole and perfect na-

* Barrow's Works, Vol. ii. p. 255. Ed. 1716.

tures, that is to say, the Godhead and manhood were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man." Art. sec. — It is added by an expositor, "the essential properties of one nature were not communicated to the other nature—each kept his respective properties distinct, without the least confusion in their most intimate union." *

"In whatever way," says Professor Stuart, "the union of the two natures was effected, it neither destroyed nor essentially changed either the divine or the human nature." He supposes Christ to be "God omniscient and omnipotent; and still a feeble man of imperfect knowledge."

It is unnecessary to add more to show what the received opinion on this subject is. — The doctrine of the union of the two natures in the person of Jesus Christ, in the form in which it is stated in the above extracts, is admitted, as far as we know, by all genuine trinitarians. No one of them doubts that Christ was perfect man; no one of them professes to doubt that he was also perfect God. According to this doctrine, when fairly stated, an infinite nature with all its essential attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, necessary and everlasting existence, incapable of suffering or change, was indissolubly united in the person of Jesus Christ, with a finite nature, with all its properties, as imperfect knowledge, weakness, exposure to sorrow, pain, and death, in such a manner, that the two natures remain for ever distinct, each retaining unaltered all its former attributes.

Now to this extraordinary doctrine we have several strong objections. Before proceeding to state them,

* Prettyman, Elements of Christian Theology, Vol. ii.

however, we will pause to make one observation suggested by the foregoing narrative. It is this: There is a strong antecedent probability, that the doctrine will be found, upon examination, to be equally unsupported by scripture and by reason. It appears from ecclesiastical history that the simple and unlearned Christians of the earlier and purer ages of the church knew nothing about it; that the first traces of it are found among the learned Platonizing converts; that its features were at first rude and imperfect; that it from time to time received modifications and additions as the disciples of the Egyptian philosophy, the most absurd that ever disgraced the human intellect, flowed into the church; that it was long opposed on account of its antichristian tendency; that so late as the end of the third century, it had not succeeded in eradicating from the minds of the generality of Christians, learned or unlearned, the great doctrine of the inferior and derived nature of the Son; and finally, that it gathered strength and was matured amid storms of controversy, at a time when the principles of sound criticism and just reasoning had fallen into contempt. That such a doctrine, growing up with the worst philosophy of the worst times, should originally have sprung from the bosom of Christianity, and not from the vicious systems of human speculation, in the midst of which it was nurtured, that it should have remained hidden for years in the records of our Saviour's instructions, and the writings of his apostles, and its existence there not have been suspected till the Alexandrian Platonists pointed it out, is a supposition altogether too extravagant for credit. Its late rise, in union with the philosophical jargon of the age, to which it was wedded, and from which it was con-

tent to borrow its terms and illustrations, renders it difficult, if not impossible, for us to believe, that it was one of the truths, which either our Saviour or his apostles were commissioned to impart to the world. In tracing its history, indeed, we gather, at every step, evidence of its human and earthly origin.

Our principal objections to the orthodox distinction of two natures in Jesus Christ are, that it involves an absurdity; that it destroys the personal unity of Jesus, and introduces strange perplexity into our conceptions of his character; that it exposes him to the charge of equivocation and dishonesty; that it destroys the efficacy of his example, and nullifies his instructions; that it is unnecessary, and fails of the object for which it is alleged to be wanted; that it thus carries with it irresistible evidence of its falsehood, it bears all the marks of a most improbable and extravagant fiction; and finally, that after the most careful search, we find no traces of it in the sacred writings.

In the first place, we think that the doctrine of two natures in Jesus Christ, as held by its advocates, is absurd, and consequently that no evidence whatever would be sufficient to establish it. Before we believe it, we must abandon the use of our understandings; we must free ourselves from a disposition to weigh evidence; we must have the convenient pliancy of mind, the happy facility of belief, to which the good father had attained, when he said, "I believe, because it is impossible." If we reflect for a moment on the qualities of the divine and human natures, we must, one would think, be convinced, that they can never be united in the same mind or person. They are absolutely incompatible with

each other; they cannot possibly exist together in the same intelligent agent. What are the attributes of the divine and human natures? God is infinite, everlasting, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, and infallible. Man is finite, limited in knowledge and power, weak, erring, subject to vicissitude, disease, and death. Now, let any one, who ventures to use his understanding, say whether these qualities are compatible with each other. For ourselves, we think they are such, that their union in the same being is naturally impossible. It is the union of infinite and finite, of knowledge and ignorance, of power and weakness, of perfection and imperfection. We may as well talk of the union of light and darkness, or of any two qualities, of which the one necessarily implies the negation or absence of the other.

What is the consequence of the union of divine and human attributes in the same mind or being, on the supposition, admitted by trinitarians, that the two natures remain distinct, none of the qualities of either being lost or changed? Why, that a being may be at the same time infinite and finite; that he may be omnipotent, yet partake of weakness and infirmity, and be unable of himeslf to do all things; that he may be omniscient, yet be ignorant of many things; that he may be the Author of the universe, yet a wailing infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger; a being incapable of pain and suffering, yet a man of sorrows, who expired on the cross, was placed in a shroud, and slept in the tomb. Now if this be not contradiction and absurdity, we confess we know not what contradiction and absurdity are.

We do not think our opponents very fortunate in their

attempts to illustrate the doctrine of two natures in Jesus Christ by comparison. Thus we are told, that for an explanation of it we must look into ourselves, and consider the union of soul and body in man; "for as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ." Such is the language of the Athanasian creed. The comparison it suggests has been a favorite one with the assertors of the theological doctrine of the incarnation, from the time this doctrine came into vogue to the present day. That such has been the fact, we think a remarkable instance of the effect of hereditary prejudices in blinding the understanding, and of the lamentable weakness of human nature, which induces men to listen to flimsy argument and mere sophistry, when employed in the support of received opinions.

The comparison of the two natures of Jesus Christ with the union of spirit and body in ourselves, may serve to introduce confusion and darkness into a person's ideas, in consequence of which he may lose sight of the absurdity of the hypothesis, which it is meant to illustrate; — perhaps he may think, that he has, at length, hit upon a parallel, which solves all difficulties. But a little sober reflection, we think, must abate his confidence. To us the two cases appear totally dissimilar. Man is a complex being, very different from that compound being, which Christ is represented by our adversaries to be. If you admit the common distinction, and say that man is made up of matter and spirit, and then inquire what is his nature, the only general and intelligible answer to this inquiry is, that it is those properties, corporeal and mental, which result from his constitution and physical organization; that is, all those qualities, which con-

stitute him what in his present state he is. Now it cannot be said, that any of these qualities are incompatible with others. There is nothing in any of them, which makes it a contradiction or absurdity to suppose, that they may all exist together in the same subject. You may, indeed, affirm of a part, what is not true of the whole of man. You may say of his body, that it has extension and solidity, and attribute to his mind perception, memory, judgment; but here is no contradiction. You do not attribute to him, as an *individual* or *whole*, opposite qualities. You do not ascribe to his *person* qualities or acts so utterly repugnant, that one necessarily excludes the other, as light excludes darkness, or omnipotence, weakness. Our objection to the union of two natures in the person of Jesus Christ, is, that it brings together an assemblage of qualities, which are incompatible with each other; that it ascribes to Christ, as an *individual* or *person*, properties between which there is such an utter repugnance, such direct opposition, that they cannot exist together in the same subject. Trinitarians affirm, that Christ is perfect God and perfect man; consequently he must have all the qualities of both, as omnipotence and weakness, infallibility and fallibility, infinite knowledge and limited and partial information; and these qualities are affirmed of him in a *personal character*. Man presents no phenomenon resembling this; no such combination of incongruous and opposite qualities.

To say of Christ, that he is divine and human, infinite and finite, omnipotent and weak, is to assert nothing more strange or mysterious, it is contended, than to affirm of man that he is mortal and immortal. But the fallacy of this statement is quite obvious. The expressions in

question do not belong to the same class, nor have they any real, but only a seeming resemblance. When we say that man is mortal and immortal, we do not employ terms which, in the connexion in which they stand, have any opposition or repugnance; they are not, in fact, opposites; they convey no incompatible ideas. What we affirm in one part of the proposition we do not deny in the other. By the assertion, man is mortal, we mean that his present mode of existence will cease, and by the assertion that he is immortal, we mean that he will continue in being for ever. The two assertions are distinct, but not opposed. We affirm simply that man will undergo a change at death, but that this change will not amount to an absolute annihilation of his being, and in this proposition there is nothing contradictory or absurd. A similar explanation may be given of numerous other propositions, in which the same thing is *apparently* affirmed and denied of the same subject. The terms in different parts of the proposition either change their signification, or they are used in senses not really, but only apparently opposed. The same solution, however, does not apply to the proposition, Christ is finite and infinite, for the terms here employed are by their nature wholly opposed, and undergo no change of signification in the different parts of the proposition. We affirm, in one breath, that he is finite and not finite, God and not God, the terms, the whole time, being used in the same sense, and thus fall into as palpable a contradiction as could be uttered.

We object, in the second place, to the doctrine of the two natures in Jesus Christ, as held by trinitarians, that it destroys his personal unity; that it makes him two

distinct persons, two beings. It is not necessary for us here to go into the metaphysical inquiry, in what personality consists. Our common apprehensions are sufficient to guide us. A person is an intelligent agent; he has one will and one consciousness; he has perceptions and feelings, which he may properly call his own. Now we maintain, that personality, thus explained, simple, undivided personality, and individuality, belonged to Jesus as truly and properly, as it belongs to any other being. We maintain, that he is really one — one mind, one person, one being, having one undivided consciousness, in a word, that he is one in the same sense in which either of us is one. This we hold to be a fundamental and self-evident truth, and we think, that any hypothesis or view, which is subversive of it, a hypothesis, which divides Christ, makes him two persons, two beings, as separate and distinct as any two of us are, bears the stamp of error on its very face. This consequence, we hesitate not to say, is chargeable on the views entertained by trinitarians concerning the divine and human natures of Christ. They assign to him two entire and distinct minds; the one infinitely superior to the human, having distinct properties, views and perceptions, having, in fact, nothing in common with human nature; the other, human, having a will, perceptions, and feelings exclusively its own. This surely makes Christ two persons, if we understand anything about personality; and two as far removed from each other as infinite from finite. He possesses, we are informed, proper and supreme divinity united with a human soul, perfect and entire in all its capacities and affections. He is God and man. Now God is an intelligent agent; the human mind of Christ another intelligent agent; each nature,

we are told, retains its proper attributes, — "the essential properties of one are not imparted to the other." How it is possible to escape the conclusion, that here are two intelligent agents, two persons, we acknowledge we are unable to conjecture. It is really matter of astonishment to us, that any one, who reflects at all on the subject, does not perceive the insuperable difficulties, which the hypothesis of two natures presents, with regard to the personal unity of the Saviour.

Trinitarians do not hesitate to ascribe to each of the two supposed natures of Jesus Christ qualities strictly personal. They sometimes speak of him as having the essential attributes of God — as performing what God alone can perform; at other times, they describe him as having the perceptions, and all the sinless infirmities of man; as being tempted and exposed to suffering, as we are. It appears surprising, that they do not perceive that in doing this, they make him two beings as distinct from each other, as any two of their fellow mortals are, and as remote as God is from man. It is true that formally, and in words, they ascribe to him undivided personality. Thus the council of Ephesus decided in opposition to Nestorius, that the two natures in Jesus Christ form one person. But this, we have seen, is an impossible supposition; the two natures necessarily form two separate and entire agents, each possessing proper individuality and consciousness; and as long as each nature retains its peculiar properties and affections, they must remain two — two individuals, persons, agents. No human decrees can alter the nature of things. Truth is truth, and falsehood is falsehood, whether men perceive it or not. Councils may vote, that two is one, that two minds and

two agents, form one mind, and one agent, but what then? Can their votes render that true, which is by the nature of things impossible or absurd?

The importance of preserving the strict and proper unity of Jesus Christ, and the strange confusion and absurdity, which would result from a belief of his divided personality and two-fold being, will, and consciousness, would authorize us to dwell longer on this topic. But on so plain a point it seems difficult to speak without becoming trite. To resort to any labored argument, or abstract process of reasoning, to prove that two minds, a finite and infinite, divine and human, supposed to be lodged in the same fleshly tabernacle, yet retaining each its original, distinct, and proper attributes, necessarily form two, — two persons, two beings, two agents, would seem a foolish waste of time and labor. A simple statement of the point in debate appears, in our view, all that is needed. Let the doctrine of the two natures, in its received form, be fairly explained, we think we may safely appeal to any person of a plain and unprejudiced mind, and ask whether such a doctrine can possibly be true. No argument seems necessary to its refutation. It carries evidence of its falsehood on its very front. The fact that it violates the personal unity of the Savior, assigning to him a double individuality, if we may so express ourselves, making him in reality two beings, in the same sense in which God and any one of his intelligent and finite offspring are two, at once, and fully condemns it.

Our next objection is of a graver character. The doctrine we are examining, implicates, as we conceive, the moral character of our Savior, impeaches his veraci-

ty, and attributes to him deceit, equivocation, and falsehood. This is a very weighty charge. We cannot endure to hear the name of Jesus, even by supposition, coupled with fraud and dishonesty. We regard him as "holy, harmless, and undefiled," in a sense in which no other being who has ever trodden our earth, has a claim to be called such. The purity of his mind could not be surpassed; it was entire and perfect, partaking of the brightness of divinity. An inflexible love of truth, an openness, and beautiful and majestic simplicity, were among the most striking features of his character. For these features, for his purity, his ingenuousness, and his truth, we reverence him, and would combat with our whole strength whatever views tend to impair or destroy this reverence. We hold a belief of his integrity among our firmest, fondest persuasions, and this belief nothing would tempt us to resign. To be compelled to abandon it, to have our confidence in the pure character of Jesus of Nazareth shaken, and be forced to conclude, that in imparting his doctrines to the world, and even in his hours of familiar intercourse with his disciples, he made use of deceit, or mental reservation, would cause us insupportable gloom and anguish. We object to the doctrine of the two natures, that it wrests from us this precious persuasion,—a persuasion of his entire sincerity and explicitness.

Let it not be said, that the doctrine is not chargeable with any such consequence. It is, according to every view we can take of it, justly chargeable with it. Thus we are told that Jesus sometimes spoke and acted in his human, and sometimes in his divine nature; that when he said, that he could of himself do nothing, he meant, that as man he could do nothing, although as God he

could do all things; when he declared, that he knew not the day and hour of judgment, we are to understand by this declaration, that he was ignorant of it as man, although he knew it perfectly well as God. Now this, we affirm, is precisely what, in a fellow-mortal, we should call, by the mildest term, equivocation. It is absolutely inconsistent with that openness and integrity which we are authorized, by the laws of social intercourse, to expect from each other. When one affirms that he does not know a thing, he means, if he is an honest man, that he does not know it in any way whatever. It is vain for him to allege, that he knows it only in a certain character, that he is ignorant of it as man; as if a priest should declare, that he is ignorant of a fact as man, though he knows it as confessor; or a person should affirm, that as a corporeal being, he is ignorant of what as an intelligent or spiritual being he knows well enough. This will not save him from the charge of equivocation or falsehood. Let us beware of ascribing to Christ conduct which would be thought disingenuous or immoral in a fellow-mortal. If he did not deceive, if he made the ordinary use of language, he could not declare, that he was ignorant of what he knew in any manner whatever. It is a poor subterfuge to say, that he was ignorant of it in his human, though he knew it in his divine nature. No matter in what way he knew it; if he knew it in either nature, he knew it in a *personal* capacity, *his person including both natures;* that is, he knew it in an absolute sense; and could not then, with reason or truth, declare his ignorance of it. Would his disciples, or those who heard him, suspect him of any reservation, or of using equivocal language? Would they not suppose, that when he told them

he did not know or could not do a thing, his words were to be understood in their ordinary sense? If they were used in any uncommon sense, which he took no care to point out, how can he be defended from the charge of having made a deceitful use of language?

If words have any fixed meaning, our Saviour expressly disclaims the possession of any attributes strictly and properly divine: as omnipotence — *I can of my own self do nothing:* supreme, infinite goodness — *Why callest thou* ME GOOD? *there is none good but* ONE, *that is* GOD: omniscience — *Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, neither the* SON, *but the Father.* This is plain language; there is no mystery or obscurity in it. The terms, *I, me, self*, as every one knows, always denote an *individual* or *person*, and they include the whole of that person; they are not appropriated to any part or member of such person; they comprehend all which goes to constitute him what he is, viewed as an individual or whole. In this sense our Saviour must have used them, or he must have been guilty of manifest prevarication. To say that by *self* he meant only the inferior part of his nature, and intended to assert only, that this part was not truly divine, or did not possess, inherently and of itself, infinite power and knowledge, is to make him express himself, as no honest man, not bereft of his sober senses, ever did or ever would.

Again, we are accustomed to look to Jesus as affording an example of deep, confiding, and submissive piety, manifested in all his words and actions, and especially by frequent and earnest prayer; and we object to the doctrine of his supreme divinity, that it destroys the force of

this example. Indeed, upon the supposition that he was truly God, we are unable to comprehend what is meant by those expressions of dependence and trust, which constantly fell from his lips. Are we to understand by them, that, in his human, he felt dependent on his divine nature? that one part of himself leaned for support on another part of himself? Had this been his meaning, he would certainly have chosen language better fitted to convey it. Once more: what construction are we to put on his prayers? To whom were they directed? Will you say, that in his human nature, he prayed to his divine? in one part of his person to another part of it? Or, as the second person of the trinity, did he pray to the first person of the trinity? As the second of three "somewhats," or three "distinctions," all equal, existing in the same being, did he pray to the first of those "distinctions," or "somewhats," for both these terms are employed by trinitarians? If he was the infinite God incarnate, his prayers must either have been addressed to one of three persons or distinctions in one being, by another of the persons or distinctions in the same being; so that the *being* who prays, and the *being* to whom the prayer is addressed, are the same; or they must have been addressed to the divine part of his person by the human part of it; so that the *person* who prays, and the *person* to whom the prayer is addressed, are the same. One of these two suppositions the Trinitarian is compelled to adopt; and we know not which of them is the more absurd. Both of them render Christ's devotions unintelligible, and deprive us of the legacy of his precious example.

Further, we think that the doctrine of two natures in

Jesus Christ, as influencing the laws of interpretation, throws the utmost darkness and obscurity over the sacred writings. We consider it a plain truth, that the Bible is to be interpreted in precisely the same way with other ancient writings. We are to ascertain the sense of it by the same process that we employ to ascertain the sense of any work, which we attempt to read. On any other supposition it is perfectly unintelligible: and the fact, that it was unintelligible, would force us to conclude, at once, that it had no claims to a divine character. If God condescends, by messengers and prophets, to instruct men on subjects connected with their most important interests, we may be certain, that he will cause the information which he thinks fit to communicate, to be conveyed through a medium capable of being understood; that is, the messengers he employs must use language in the ordinary way; they must observe those established laws and usages, from which no writer, who wishes to be understood, on whatever subject he treats, ventures to depart. We cannot suppose, that he would so far sport with his creatures, as to present the instruction he professes to impart, in a form which would render it useless, by preventing it from being understood. — We complain of the doctrine of the two natures, as explained by its friends, that it leaves us in the utmost doubt about the sense of revelation; that it makes the New Testament a book wholly unlike all others; that it renders it necessary for us to judge of the meaning of it, therefore, as we judge of that of no other book ancient or modern. The consequence is, we can never be certain, that we understand the facts or observations recorded by the historians of our Lord. The impressions which we receive concerning

the most important of them, may be entirely erroneous. It is not pretended, that our Lord on any occasion, intimated in which of his two capacities, the divine or human, he spoke or acted. He nowhere observes, this I say as man, or this I say as God. He has not thrown out the least hint, by which we may be guided in determining what is to be ascribed to one nature, and what to the other. Nor is this deficiency supplied by the historians of his life. They have left on record nothing by which we may be assisted in deciding in which nature he at any time spoke or acted. No caution is used by them to prevent misconception. No care is taken to guard their readers against taking the words of their Master in their literal and obvious sense, when he disclaims the attributes of the Infinite Father. This is strange, it is wholly unaccountable, on the supposition that they understood him in the sense in which trinitarians would have us believe they did. It is an omission we cannot explain, and one which may be attended with fatal consequences, for it exposes us to perpetual error in our attempts to find the sense of our Lord's words. A more than oracular obscurity hangs over the sacred pages; they may mean anything, or everything, according to the prejudices and fancy of the reader, and there is no end to the absurdities they may be made to teach.

In fact, upon the principle of interpretation adopted by trinitarians, the plainest assertions of our Saviour may be invalidated, nor could he have denied that he possessed supreme divinity, in language, the force of which might not have been evaded. Let us suppose that instead of saying *my Father is greater than I — I can of myself do nothing — My doctrine is not mine but his that*

sent me, he had asserted expressly, *I am not the supreme God—I am not the same being with the Father, who commissioned and sent me*; we have only to affirm, in order to set aside the evidence of these latter assertions, that they have reference only to his human nature—that they are true of him as man only. The two classes of assertions admit of a common construction; if the former do not teach that the Son is inferior to the Father and distinct from him, neither do the latter, nor is it in the power of words to express it: and had our Saviour been commissioned to inculcate it, he must have sought in vain for language, which the ingenuity of men might not have distorted into a sense entirely foreign from that he intended to convey.

We do not, upon mature reflection, perceive in what manner the above mentioned objection can be obviated, without abandoning the doctrine of two natures. We know it is said, that we must determine whether Christ's human or divine nature is referred to by what is affirmed of it, according to the maxim of the schools, "*the subject is known by its predicate.*" Thus with regard to the assertions, "my Father is greater than I," "I can of my own self do nothing," "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only," and those in which Jesus is described as praying to the Father, being exalted, and receiving from him a name above every name, and others of a similar character, we are told that they refer to Christ not in a personal capacity, but in one of his natures only, that is, his human. But in what manner this strange inference is authorized by the maxim alluded to, we confess ourselves unable to discover. It appears to us to be

founded on a disregard of the plain and obvious force of expressions in themselves quite simple and intelligible. If language is capable of a definite sense, and we know anything about the laws of reasoning, the legitimate inference to be drawn from the above mentioned assertions is, that Jesus is inferior to the Father, not as to a part, but the whole, of his nature; that is, he is so in an absolute unqualified sense. There is nothing in what is affirmed concerning him, which necessarily requires the subject to be taken in a restrained sense; nothing in the nature of the expressions employed, which limits them to a part of this subject. These expressions, in their most obvious sense, are not repugnant to reason, nor, we think, to the general train of facts and arguments found in the Scriptures, and do not therefore require to be restricted. To restrain them by supposing, that they are appropriated only to one part of Christ's nature, that they are not true when affirmed of him absolutely or generally, is really to put on them a construction altogether unnecessary and manifestly forced.—A doctrine, which is supported by a mode of interpretation, which would convert the Bible into an inexplicable book, and render all human language dark and uncertain, we need not add, cannot be true.

Let us next advert to some of the supposed uses of the doctrine. Its advocates consider it important, first, as furnishing a solution of some difficulties arising from the apparently discordant language used by the sacred writers with reference to Christ, who sometimes, as they admit, speak of him as a finite and derived being, and sometimes, they contend, employ expressions, which imply the possession of a divine nature and divine attributes. The most ready method of solving these difficulties, they tell

us, is to suppose that he possessed not one nature, but two, a derived and underived, a finite and infinite, a human and a divine. This supposition, it is urged, makes all plain; it furnishes a key, by the help of which, the treasures of hidden wisdom, locked up in the inspired volume, may be laid open, so that all may be partakers.

To this statement it might be sufficient to reply, that the hypothesis in question, as we have shown, is liable to insuperable objections, especially that it supposes a principle of interpretation, which mystifies language and makes the Bible utter uncertain or delusive sounds. But we are prepared to meet the argument on different ground. We maintain, that the difficulties alluded to are greatly exaggerated: that the greater part, if not all of them, may be fully removed by the application of those rules of criticism, which we think ourselves authorised to apply in the explanation of all other writings: and the hypothesis of the two natures is not therefore needed for their solution.

Our views on the subject of its necessity, as affecting apparent discrepancies in the language of the New Testament, may be stated in few words. We consider the fact, that Jesus Christ is a being distinct from the Father, and inferior to him, completely established, by the general strain of the Bible. No fact or sentiment is more plainly, explicitly, and forcibly taught and inculcated. Take the following among numerous other testimonies equally express, which might be quoted. "This is life eternal, that they might know *thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*" John xvii. 3. "But to us there is but *one God, the Father*, of whom are all things, and we in him; and *one Lord*, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." 1 Cor. viii. 6. "There is *one God*, and *one mediator between*

God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. ii. 5. At the same time we admit, that there are a few passages capable of receiving a construction, which favors the trinitarian supposition ; but they do not, we conceive, necessarily require this construction ; they admit of being understood differently, without appearing to be forced from their natural sense. We think that without departing from the established laws of criticism, we are able to explain them in a manner consistent with the views which we are led, from the general tenor of the language of the New Testament, to form of the Saviour. We conceive, that nothing is there said of him, which may not be said of a being inferior in his whole nature to God. Language occurs there, which is sometimes figurative, and sometimes partakes of the nature of rhetorical description ; it is partly popular, and requires, therefore, to be restrained and modified ; and partly the language of feeling and sentiment, which is necessarily somewhat indefinite. It is not surprising, that some of this language should at first view occasion embarrassment, and that some expressions are met with, which admit of being understood in different senses. It would be strange if they conveyed the same sentiment, or shades of sentiment, to all minds. We are persuaded, however, that they are susceptible of a construction, which is in unison with our views of the person and rank of the Saviour, and therefore think the hypothesis of two natures unnecessary.

It is always easy to gather, from the general cast of an author's writings, and the mode in which he ordinarily expresses himself, if he is accustomed to think and write with any tolerable accuracy, what are his leading views on the subject of which he treats. These views will be

brought forward distinctly; they will, probably, be frequently adverted to, and be presented with great prominence. Passages, however, may occur in his writings, the meaning of which is less clear, passages, perhaps, which understood in their literal and obvious sense, and without reference to the trains of reflection into which they enter, may appear to militate with the views and principles we are led by the general import of his language to ascribe to him. Now what is the process, which common courtesy, and the laws of sound criticism, authorise and require us to pursue with regard to such passages? How are we to regard them? Are we to consider them of chief importance in our attempts to ascertain our author's meaning? Are we to select them as proof texts? Are we to erect systems on them? Are we to appeal to them as the passages, which best express the real views of the writer? Are we, by exalting the letter above the spirit, to make them utter sentiments at war with those breathed, perhaps from every page of his productions? No. We do not proceed thus in the interpretation of any human author. We do not expect to draw important proofs and illustrations from the more obscure and mystical expressions a writer may sometimes employ. We do not always remain satisfied with the meaning, which first offers itself, on meeting with such expressions. If, according to their most obvious construction, they appear repugnant to common sense, and the prevailing tone of the writings, in which they occur, we feel compelled to suppose, that we have not found their true signification, and we seek some other, which is in harmony with reason, and with the known opinions of the author.

On this principle we proceed in the interpretation of the Bible. We conceive, that obscure and ambiguous

terms and phrases, which seldom occur, must bend to its prevailing language and spirit; the more difficult parts must be explained by the more easy, figurative by plain, the more abstruse by the more simple. From the manner in which our Saviour and his apostles usually express themselves, when they speak without metaphor; from the views and illustrations to which they most frequently recur; from observations and assertions often reiterated, we must endeavor to ascertain what their real sentiments were; what the great and fundamental doctrines they received and were anxious to inculcate. In interpreting the more dark and mysterious expressions, which are occasionally met with in their discourses and writings, we must adopt a meaning, which harmonizes with those doctrines, though it may not always be such as the natural force of the expressions employed would most readily suggest. This is reasonable; common sense and common justice, in fact, require it of us. Now the simple and proper inferiority of the Son to the Father, we think, is inculcated, and echoed, and reechoed, from Matthew to the Revelations, and is not, therefore, to be set aside by a few expressions, which, taken literally, and apart from others, with which they stand connected, may appear to suggest a different conclusion. Such expressions, we feel under the necessity of supposing, are to be received with some modification and restriction. They are few in number, and the evidence derived from them comparatively of little weight at most. Allowing it its full force, it is insufficient to overthrow or materially weaken the immense mass of proofs, which are brought to establish the fact, that Jesus partook of a finite and derived nature and attributes, and of no other.

Further, the advocates for the two fold nature of Christ, allege that their views are attended with some advantages as regards the atonement. A wide field of remark is here opened, but we must confine ourselves to one or two observations. To the popular doctrine of a satisfaction or substitute, we object, that it robs God of his moral and paternal attributes; that instead of calming our apprehensions and relieving distrust, therefore, it only serves to aggravate our fears, and wrap nature in gloom. But waiving this and numerous other objections, which might be urged, we shall simply point out one fallacy, which wholly invalidates the argument for Christ's divinity from the supposed necessity of an exalted victim, a fallacy which has been often enough exposed, but is not yet abandoned. Sin, it is asserted, since it is committed against an infinite Being, is an infinite evil, and deserves infinite punishment; and none but an infinite being is therefore capable of making atonement for it. This reasoning has in it so much palpable sophistry, that we may well be surprised it should ever be employed, or for a moment listened to. In the first place, nothing can be more illogical than to suppose, that sin, because committed against an infinite being, is an infinite offence. No act of a finite being can have a character of infinity. But throwing out of view this and similar considerations, which might be added, it is untrue that an infinite atonement has been made, even upon the hypothesis of trinitarians. Would they be understood to say, that the supreme and infinite God, the great Author and Preserver of nature, really suffered and died on the cross? that an omnipotent Being was put to death by children of dust? that the Creator perished by the hands of his creatures? that the world was left three days, during which Jesus lay in the

grave, without a God, that the universe stood without a Preserver. No. The bare supposition of such an event, if it were possible, would, in the highest degree, shock the feelings of every one. On the hypothesis then that Christ was God as well as man, he suffered only in his human nature. No infinite nature suffered. What then becomes of the infinite atonement? No such atonement has ever been made, even admitting that Christ united in himself the divine and human natures. On this supposition, it was man only that endured the cross; so that with regard to the doctrine of the atonement, a belief of the deity of Jesus, has not the least advantage over a belief of his simple humanity.

One further difficulty with regard to the death of Christ, suggests itself, upon the hypothesis assumed by trinitarians. They are compelled to disown the conclusion, that the divine nature suffered; yet the divine and human natures, it is asserted, were indissolubly united in the person of the sufferer; and we are told expressly by Dr. Barrow, that 'the union did not cease, even when our Lord as man did undergo death'—that this union 'persisted' when that 'between human soul and body was dissolved.' Here certainly appears to be occasion for some very nice distinctions—distinctions, we are afraid, much too refined for common minds. To a man of plain understanding it must appear somewhat paradoxical to say, that one of two natures indissolubly united in the same person, may with this person undergo death, while the other does not partake of suffering. It would seem that the union must be dissolved at death. But this is inadmissible upon the hypothesis of trinitarians; the union is indissoluble. We leave them to get rid of the consequences.

Some other advantages are occasionally described as

following from the union of two natures in Christ, which we do not deem of sufficient importance to be noticed.

If the objections stated in the foregoing pages, have any force, the doctrine of two natures in Jesus Christ is attended with difficulties vastly more embarrassing than those it professes to remove. Admitting the latter to be as great as they appear to the advocates of the doctrine, they amount we conceive, to this, and to nothing more—that apparently discordant expressions are occasionally found in the scriptures, which this doctrine reduces into harmony with each other—that the sacred writers, in speaking of Christ, use language, which appears consistent only on the supposition, that he possessed both a divine and a human nature. To remove apparent discrepancies an hypothesis is employed, which, according to the view we have taken of it, is full of contradictions; an hypothesis, which, as we have seen, is manifestly absurd and impossible; which violates the personal unity of Jesus; impeaches his veracity; and destroys the force of his example; mars the simplicity, and darkens the sense of the sacred writings, and which, after all, fails of its object, in the very point, where, if its friends are to be believed, it is most wanted, that is, the satisfaction or atonement. No hypothesis can be attended with greater inconveniences than this. Whatever difficulties we escape, we fall into greater, by adopting it. But we have stated that, in our view, no formidable difficulties arise from the forms of language alluded to; and that all alleged discrepancies disappear, when the expressions, which are supposed to imply them, are understood in the sense they manifestly bear. We see not the least necessity, then, for the supposition of two natures in Christ, even were the difficulties attending it fewer than they are.

The above mentioned objections are enough to stamp on the doctrine under consideration the character of error. We have, however, one further objection, and it is our last. We have examined the doctrine in its several parts and bearings, and followed it out into some of its obvious consequences, and have seen, that it carries on the face of it evidence of having originated in human invention. We should be surprised to find any support for such a doctrine in the scriptures. We venerate them too much to believe, that they can teach it; and we state, as our only remaining objection, our full conviction that it receives no support whatever from them. It is not alleged by its friends, that it is anywhere expressly stated in the sacred writings, in the form in which it is received by them. It is admitted by their soundest divines, that nothing is directly said of the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ. It is entirely a matter of inference, that such a union exists. This we consider very unfortunate for the hypothesis. It throws no small degree of suspicion over it. It might have been expected that a doctrine of so extraordinary a character, so opposed to all the common apprehensions of the human mind, and the ordinary belief of the Jews, to whom our Saviour's instructions were originally addressed, so novel, and mysterious, so calculated to astonish and repel honest, and alarm, if you will, prejudiced minds, it might have been expected that such a doctrine, had it formed part of revelation, would have been accompanied with the strongest evidence. The most ample testimony of its truth would have been given. It would have been stated in the most plain and explicit manner; the necessary definitions and illustrations would have been added, and objections met and refuted. One would have sup-

posed that it would be a topic to which our Lord would perpetually recur, and on which he would fully and unequivocally explain himself, expressing his views in language which would effectually preclude all misconception and uncertainty. Reserve on a subject confessedly so obscure and difficult would be peculiarly misplaced, as it would necessarily produce doubt, perplexity, and error. When we take into view these considerations, and reflect, that not a single passage occurs in the whole New Testament, which contains anything like an inculcation of the doctrine in question, the omission appears very extraordinary. We say more, it seems utterly incapable of being accounted for. The doctrine, if true, is certainly an important one, and of a nature, as we have said, which required that it should be taught with the greatest distinctness. Why then this silence upon the subject, on the part of our Saviour and his apostles? Why is it, that no direct trace, no incidental notice of it, is found in any expressions, which dropped from their lips? Why are we left to gather it from ingenious comparisons and remote processes of reasoning? Why compelled to search the Scriptures in vain for terms adequate to express it, for it is not pretended, that the phrases *twofold nature*, *God-man*, *divine-human*, and others found so convenient in modern times, or anything resembling them, are met with in our Bibles? These are inquiries to which the friends of the doctrine never have, and never can, furnish a satisfactory reply.

There is another consideration, which has great weight with us. It may be fairly concluded, that those, who were about the person of our Lord, or who were occasionally addressed by him, had no suspicion that he was God, from the circumstance, that they give no evidence of

having felt that astonishment, which the disclosure of such a fact could not have failed to excite in their breasts. Had they regarded him as the supreme God, is it possible, that upon first becoming acquainted with the fact, they would have betrayed no surprise? That he was in appearance a man is not doubted; as such he was presented to their senses. What then must have been their astonishment, upon hearing that he, who stood before them in the human form, was the Author of the universe! Yet nothing of this astonishment appears to have been felt by them. It is indeed more than once said, that those about him were astonished at his mighty works; and the inference they made was, that he was *of* or *from* God;—the idea that he was God himself, seems never to have occurred to their minds. No curiosity was expressed, and no inquiries made, of such a kind as might have been expected, had they entertained any suspicion, that he was perfect God as well as perfect man. The inference is, that they were ignorant of any such union; and this, we think, affords satisfactory evidence that it did not exist. Had it existed, can we believe, for an instant, that they would have received no intimation whatever of it? Would they have been left in ignorance of it to the last? In his moments of confidential intercourse, would their Master have dropped no hint from which they might gather it? Would he have died with this weighty and important secret locked up in his own breast? Would he have persevered in his silence after his resurrection? Would he have finally left the world to go to his Father, and yet have taken no care to inform his attached and grateful followers of a fact esteemed by its friends so precious? Such conduct would be altogether inexplicable. The fair inference is, that the doctrine was a production

of later ages. We lament to add, that by adopting it without any necessity, we assume an hypothesis, which unsupported, as it appears, by the scriptures, and followed by consequences the most appalling, seems to us to disgrace religion, and dishonor the human understanding.

Nor let it be imagined, that anything is lost by abandoning this doctrine. Jesus remains an object of our sincerest, and, under God, our profoundest gratitude and regard. We can have no doubt of his sufficiency for the purpose which he was sent to accomplish; our confidence in him as a deliverer, who is able to save to the utmost, is not diminished; our hopes of pardon through him are not impaired or shaken. God raised him up and employed him to convey the benefits of his mercy to mankind. On that mercy we rest, believing, that through whatever medium our Father may have chosen to impart it, that medium must be effectual, and that mercy shared by us, unless by a fault of ourselves.

On the other hand, by discarding the doctrine of two natures, as stated by trinitarians, we are freed from numerous embarrassments, into which an attempt to explain and defend it unavoidably plunges its advocates. We are exempted from the charge of believing a contradiction or impossibility; the language of the sacred writings ceases to appear strange and mysterious, and all painful uncertainty about its meaning vanishes; we preserve the personal unity of the Saviour, and retain the benefit of his noble example; no seeming shade is thrown over his character, no suspicion of concealment and dishonesty attaches to him; he is presented to our view robed in that heavenly purity, and truth, and ingenuousness, which makes him venerable and lovely.

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A

DIALOGUE

ON SOME OF THE CAUSES OF

INFIDELITY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
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A DIALOGUE

ON SOME OF THE CAUSES OF

INFIDELITY.

Mrs. Henderson sat alone at work one evening, when Mr. Henderson entered the parlour, having been taking a walk, as was his custom, to refresh himself after the labours of the day.

'I have been talking with George again,' said he, as he seated himself on the sofa, 'and I am altogether out of patience with him.' Mr. Henderson looked disturbed; and his wife's countenance immediately manifested sympathetic emotions.

'What has the poor boy been doing now?' she inquired in a tone of anxiety.

'I do not feel as if he were entitled to pity,' said Mr. Henderson. 'He is wilful and perverse, and I am more angry than grieved with him.'

'Whatever be his fault, my dear,' replied Mrs. Henderson mildly, 'young as he is, I think he is to be pitied; and the more wilful he is, the more I grieve for him, because I know he is only treasuring up future anguish for himself. What has he been doing?'

'I hope you will not be troubled about it!' said Mr. Henderson. 'I shall be sorry that I said any thing to you concerning the matter.'

'Dearest husband,' replied Mrs. Henderson, in a tone of affectionate expostulation, 'how can I fail to be distressed, when the two beings I love best in the world, are at variance? When my husband and my son have angry feelings between them, how is it possible I should not suffer with both?'

'But I should suppose,' said Mr. Henderson, 'you would know your husband well enough to feel assured, that he also loves his son, as well as you do; and I should think you would have sufficient confidence in his judgment and affection, to believe he would not be angry without cause.'

'I did not intend to express any doubts of the justness of your disapprobation,' replied Mrs. Henderson in a subdued tone; 'if I have done so, the anxiety of my mind must be my excuse for using inappropriate language. I had but one simple feeling of sorrow, that George has given you a new cause for complaint.'

Mr. Henderson made no reply to these explanatory remarks of his wife; and she again inquired, what their son had done to offend his father.

'He has not done any thing wrong, that I know of,' replied Mr. Henderson. 'I do not mean to find fault with his conduct; but you know he has got his head full of deistical nonsense. And he is so wilful and headstrong, he thinks he knows more than any body ever did before; there is no arguing him out of his infidel notions. He will not listen to reason.'

Mrs. Henderson sighed gently, and remained some time silent.

'It is in vain,' at length she said,' to attempt to reason against opinions that have been formed by feeling and association, without any reason to support them. I have long been watching the progress of George's char-

acter with great anxiety. I have seen the tendency to this state of mind from its commencement, and have done what I could under existing circumstances to counteract it. But though we cannot induce him to yield to argument, and though you cannot alarm him by representing to him the dangers of his errors, yet I do indulge a hope, that, after a while, our anxiety will be relieved by a change in his sentiments, and a better state of mind.'

'I do not know what is to bring it about,' said Mr. Henderson.

'Perhaps we may be able,' replied his wife, 'by gentle and judicious means, to induce him to examine the foundation of his own opinions, if he will not listen to ours. We must try to disengage his affections from the notions he has adopted; and after that, he will more easily perceive where the truth lies.'

'It appears a hopeless case to me,' said Mr. Henderson; 'this is the second time I have gone deeply into the subject with him, and pointed out his errors, his folly and his wickedness, as plainly as possible; yet he maintains his opinions as stoutly, and as pertinaciously, as if he had all the reason and truth on his side.'

'It might be better not to contend with him,' said Mrs. H.

'How is it possible to help it, while he is so unpardonably perverse?' asked Mr. H.

'There are some circumstances to palliate his errors,' said Mrs. H., 'and with young people we can hardly be too gentle, too forbearing. It is difficult to keep in mind the ardour of their feelings, and the smallness of their experience, and the consequent defects of their judgment; and yet, unless we do make all these allowances, we are in danger of confirming their false views, instead of giving them clearer and juster ones.'

'I don't know to what circumstances you allude,' replied Mr. H., 'for my part I think he has had uncommon opportunities for acquiring correct notions on religious subjects.'

'He has had uncommon opportunities of imbibing prejudices,' replied Mrs. H.

'He has heard and learned more of all the doctrinal points and sectarian views, than I knew till long after we were married,' said Mr. Henderson. 'And I was more astonished than I can express, to find him entertaining such opinions. I think Tom Paine will have to answer for more mischief than can easily be computed.'

'There are other causes beside deistical writers,' said Mrs. H., 'that have served to lead George's mind astray, and such as have, in my opinion, made more infidels than all the open attacks upon christianity, that have ever been made by professed deists.'

'To what causes do you allude?' asked Mr. Henderson; 'and how was George affected by them?'

'I allude to the circumstances in which he was placed when he first left home to receive an academical education,' replied Mrs. Henderson.

'I do not recollect any thing peculiar in his situation at that time,' said Mr. Henderson.

'Do you not remember, my dear husband,' said Mrs. Henderson, 'that when you resolved to send George to ****, I objected to it?'

'Very well,' replied Mr. Henderson.

'Do you not recollect,' continued his wife, 'that I said, you were going to place your son under the influence of people, whom we both believed had embraced many pernicious errors in their religious creed, and that I was afraid his young and ductile mind would be drawn

into a state of unnatural and injurious excitement, and that lasting evils would follow from it.'

'I remember you were alarmed,' replied Mr. H.; 'I supposed you were afraid of the boy's becoming prematurely religious; and I recollect I told you, there was no danger of his having too much religion: I judged so from the proneness of youth to disregard the subject. I was more afraid he would not have any. I was not then so well acquainted with the false and erroneous doctrines of Calvin, as I am now, and thought a little Calvinism would not hurt him, if he did get it.'

'Error and falsehood are hurtful in every degree,' replied Mrs. Henderson; 'I felt the same fear that you did, that George would not retain the religious feelings we had endeavoured to implant; and it was precisely for that reason, that I objected to his going to ****.'

'But,' inquired Mr. Henderson, 'how could his going there,—where the danger was, as you apprehended, that he would be made to believe in Calvinistic tenets—how could that have any thing to do with his now being a deist.'

'I will tell you, my dear,' replied Mrs. Henderson, 'how it operated to produce that effect; and, for fear of it, I did not wish you to send him there. I have seen this exemplified in many instances, and therefore I apprehended it in George.'

'I really cannot conceive how you can imagine his being in **** had any thing in the world to do with his present state of mind,' said Mr. Henderson, in a tone of incredulity.

'You know, my dear,' said his wife, 'that it has been a principle which has governed me, and which you have approved, that when instructing our little children, religion should be presented to them in the simplest and

plainest manner. We strove to give them the deepest, the highest, and the most expanded ideas of the character of God; and to dwell particularly on his infinite benevolence, as the quality best calculated to inspire confidence and devout affection in their young hearts. The beauty of holiness, and every divine quality manifested by Jesus Christ, were pointed out in a way to captivate them, and fix their strongest feelings on what we deemed the fundamental principles of revelation. But we avoided initiating them into what are called the mysteries of religion, thinking it wisest and best to keep the clouds and darkness, which the human mind has thrown over this beautiful and heavenly system, quite out of their view; believing, that when their hearts were imbued with the pure spirit of the gospel, and their understandings enlightened by its wisdom at a mature period of life, they would be able to grapple with the dogmas they might learn, and resist the falsehood offered as divine truth.' Mrs. Henderson paused, and looked earnestly in her husband's face.

'Well, go on,' said he.

'At an early age, you chose to send George to ****,' continued Mrs. Henderson. 'It was my duty to submit; but I felt afraid he would not escape the influence, which I believed would constantly be exerted to produce a state of feeling considered most desirable. I feared my previous endeavours to instruct him would be frustrated: and it happened as I expected.'

'I recollect something of this;' said Mr. Henderson. 'You were afraid his uncle and aunt, with whom he was to live, would be so earnest to produce an effect upon his mind, that, as he had always loved them, he could not fail to become a Calvinist. On the contrary, I believed that such a gay, lively boy, would not be likely

to notice what they said; and that they would not be able to fasten on his mind any of their wrong notions, even if they tried, which I could not, at that time, be persuaded they would think of attempting.'

'You mistake, my dear,' interrupted Mrs. Henderson; 'I did not think they would make him a Calvinist. I knew he was too young to form any opinion upon the subject. What I feared was, that his feelings would be deeply impressed, and his mind prejudiced by them I feared he would imbibe a disgust to all religion, by being harassed with the inexplicable doctrines they would endeavour to fasten on his memory; the false notions they would infuse of the divine character; and the unnatural restraints to which they would subject him.'

'Well, I did not think much about the matter,' said Mr. Henderson; 'and I confess it appeared to me you were too scrupulous; and, if I recollect rightly, the effect on his mind was not exactly what you had anticipated, nor what I had expected. When he was sick, and we were sent for, he fancied himself converted, did he not?'

'He did: but that was neither the first nor the last change which was produced by the exertions of his uncle and aunt, and the sect to which they belong.'

'I don't remember much about it,' said Mr. Henderson; 'for I looked upon it all as a trifling business, neither do I yet perceive how it has had any bearing on George's present views.'

'Nothing should be deemed trifling that is calculated to have a lasting effect upon the mind, whether that effect be good or bad,' said Mrs. Henderson.

'True,' replied her husband; 'but according to your own account, the effect upon George's mind was not lasting; and therefore, it was not worth regarding'

'The first effect, my dear,' said Mrs. Henderson earn-

estly, 'was not lasting, nor the second, nor perhaps the third; but the whole was a chain, which naturally led to the state of mind which now distresses us so much. I pray this may not be lasting; but I have fears, though not so great as yours.'

'What were the several states of mind, which you think have led to this?' asked Mr. Henderson. 'I really have not observed them.'

'The first impression that he received, after being placed in your brother's family, was excessive ennui and disgust, in consequence of being debarred so many of his accustomed amusements, and compelled to attend so many, and such long religious exercises, which, as he could not understand them, were naturally very tedious. This state of feeling lasted some time, and was attributed to home-sickness; but I was convinced it had not that origin.'

'I remember,' said Mr. H., 'that I thought from his letters, he suffered from home-sickness; and I believed it best to take no notice of it, thinking it would soon wear off.'

'The second change of his feelings,' continued Mrs. Henderson, in a tone that manifested regret and sorrow, 'was that of fear and horror, on account of the inevitable and dreadful sufferings he was taught to believe he was doomed to endure eternally, unless the irresistible grace of God were vouchsafed to save him. This terror was renewed as often as the least natural reaction of his spirits had allayed it; and at length such a nervous excitement was produced as threw him into a slow fever.'

'Are you sure that was the cause of his sickness?' inquired Mr. Henderson.

'Certainly,' replied his wife; 'nor was it an unparalleled case. During the first attack of this malady, and even

before they were aware of his being diseased, his disordered dreams were interpreted by his uncle and aunt and their pious friends, to be interpositions of Providence to save his soul from perdition, and so they persuaded him. He started from his broken slumbers one night, thinking he heard his name called; he thought he opened his eyes, and saw his chamber full of sparkling stars which were in continual motion;* he was greatly alarmed and cried aloud. His uncle and aunt, who anxiously watched over him, in the hope of a happy change, on hearing his terrified voice, went to his room, and listened to the account. They told him, in so many words, that he was hanging over hell, as by a single hair. They seemed deeply affected, and wept and prayed over him. They said it was an important moment, and would decide his fate. They thought divine grace was operating, and they endeavoured to aid it by all the means they could use to increase his emotions. God was striving with his soul, they said, to save it; and he must wrestle with the Lord, until he conquered, and compelled him to grant the salvation of his soul. The poor child had but a confused notion of what such a wrestling could be; but he believed what they told him. He cried, and groaned, and entreated to know what he could do, and besought them to pray with him, and for him. They did so, and when the violence of his feelings subsided for a moment, they charged him to continue in prayer, and strong supplication to God, that grace might be given him. They told him, if he should hear his name called again, it would be a sign of his having obtained pardon for his sins; and then he might feel sure he was one of the elect

* A fact related, in all its parts, to the writer, by one who fully believed that this was a supernatural course pursued by God, to convert her sister from sin to righteousness.

of God, and eternal glory and happiness would be his portion; his nature would, in that instant, be changed from a state wholly depraved, and incapable of any good, to one pure and holy; and nothing could ever pluck him out of the hands of his blessed Lord and Redeemer; the wrath of God would be appeased, divine justice satisfied, and eternal salvation be obtained.'

'Folly!' exclaimed Mr. Henderson. His wife went on.

'They stimulated him to continued exertion, by adding, that should he not again hear himself called, he must believe he was doomed to eternal wo, without even hope of salvation. They continued to pray and exhort him, till his mind was excited to frenzy; and at length, worn out by these violent emotions, he sunk into a stupor, and they left him.'

Unable to repress her emotions, Mrs. Henderson paused for a few minutes; after which, with a serene, though pensive expression of countenance, she continued her narration.

'It was not long before he was again aroused by a similar affection of the nervous system, a sickly dream, which was very natural in his situation, which indeed is very common in such a state of the body, and should, therefore, be treated altogether as a symptom of disease. I have very often experienced similar impressions, and so have others, without imagining it in any way connected with religion, or observing any mental effect afterwards.'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Henderson, 'How could any one think otherwise?'

'Your brother and sister believed it was the voice of God, and so they told George, and that he might now pour out his heart in hallelujahs and praises to his Maker for his unmerited goodness in saving a lost soul, and

granting such an abundant entrance into his heavenly kingdom. George gladly laid hold of these bright prospects; and the sudden relief, from excessive fear to hope and joy, caused such a reaction of the spirits, that it produced a highly active stage of fever; and he became as raving with delight as he had previously been with horror. By this time, it was discovered by those around him, that he was really diseased, and burning with fever. They became alarmed, and sent for the village physician, who pronounced him dangerously ill. The poor boy was several days on the borders of the grave. When he became convalescent, I wished to take him home, to recover his strength, and the proper tone of mind; but circumstances prevented.'

'What circumstances?' asked Mr. H. 'I cannot conceive how I could consent to leave him there after that.'

'These things appeared less important to you then,' replied Mrs. Henderson, 'than they do now. You felt, and treated the subject of religion, with much greater indifference, and made little discrimination as to the truth or falsehood of the different doctrines professed. You looked upon many of the notions of your brother and sister as so wholly absurd and irrational, that you could not imagine them to be seriously believed; and therefore thought, as George's health was restored, he could be in no danger of being affected by them. You conceived his sickness to be the cause, and not the effect of the state of mind he had been in; and the whole matter made little impression on your mind.'

'It seems very strange to me now that it should have been so,' said Mr. Henderson in a tone of sadness: 'but I must have regarded his health as much as you did; why did I not consent to his return, on that account?'

'How can you forget so entirely your reasoning on

the subject?' asked Mrs. Henderson. 'Do you not remember, that you laughed at me, and apparently with reason, for wishing to carry the child from the pure air of the country, to the hot and sickly atmosphere of the town? Beside, George had been making rapid progress in his studies; and you thought it would have a bad effect to change his school and his routine of pursuits. In short, you had not time to think much about it.'

'What was the effect on George?' asked Mr. Henderson. 'I do not recollect attending to the subject after our return.'

'The effect was such as might naturally be expected,' replied Mrs. H. 'When his strength and natural vivacity were restored, and his mind had recovered its rational and elastic action, he was led to reflect on what had taken place, and review the changes he had passed through. An unconquerable aversion to the subject of religion took possession of his feelings. Its association with his sufferings was strong, and the recollection of every scene he had experienced, extremely painful and disgusting to him. The views of the divine character daily presented to him by his uncle and aunt, and also by his teachers, who neglected no opportunity to instil their peculiar sentiments, were so opposed to those his own reflections suggested when contemplating the beauty and majesty of nature, that they became more and more abhorrent to him. Sometimes, as he has since told me, when his mind had been disturbed and bewildered by the sophistry he had listened to, he would go into a corner, and secretly express the aversion he felt for a being, so powerful and so malignant as he conceived God to be. Then, when he plunged into the woods, and cooled his heated head in the pure brook, and soothed his excited feelings in the sweet and solemn tranquil-

lity of rural scenes, his heart expanded with gratitude and love to the God, who spoke to his soul in the pure language of nature, and declared himself to be as benevolent as he is wise and powerful. Such was the effect of the course pursued with him, that he became impatient to cast off the whole of revealed religion.'

'No wonder,' said Mr. Henderson. 'The effect was perfectly natural, as you observed.'

'The same means were again and again employed,' continued Mrs. H., 'which had at first been so effectual, in the hope of renewing his excitement, but they were tried in vain: and considering him a confirmed reprobate, after all the flatteries and attentions they had lavished on him, his friends at **** began to treat him with scorn and harshness. His uncle turned him out of his house; and did not even pretend that George had offended in any other way, than in not being willing to unite with them in their high religious tone of feeling.'

'Don't tell me any thing more of their conduct,' said Mr. H.

'I suspected something was going wrong,' said Mrs. Henderson, 'and saw somewhat of the changes in his feelings, though he carefully avoided writing openly upon them. I feared his mind had been warped from its early pure and rational religion; and that, having been carried to one extreme of error by the powers of false reasoning, strong excitement of fear and hope, and affectionate treatment from his friends, while they believed him under their influence, it would, by natural reaction and a contrary course of treatment, go as much out of the right line on the opposite side: but I believed time must be allowed to wear off the effects of his late impressions, before any sentiment of delight could be again associ-

ated with serious and holy subjects. Since his return from ****, I have constantly watched for opportunities to restore his early love of God and pleasure in religion; but before his feelings had time to recover from the shock they had received, his mind became more mature, and he resolved to inform himself of the truth or falsehood of revelation and its doctrines, by a course of appropriate reading, and to receive nothing unexamined.'

'He was judicious in making those resolutions, I think,' said Mr. H.

'He was,' replied Mrs. Henderson: 'but not in the manner he carried them into operation; though he adopted the method usual with young people in like circumstances.'

'How was it?' asked her husband.

'He decided, to begin with studying all that had been urged against revelation; intending afterwards to examine the evidences in its favour. But, like too many others whose feelings are enlisted on the side of scepticism, he naturally rested where they led him, and so, after a hasty and superficial reading of the scriptures, he felt satisfied that he had done all that he need, to obtain both sides of the question, and thus thinks himself confirmed in deism.'

'Your account,' said Mr. Henderson, 'is, to be sure, a much more rational one than I thought it possible to give of his present views; and it seems strange to me, that I should have known so little about it.'

'You knew it at the time, my dear,' replied his wife; 'at least I related, and expressed my ideas of the whole transaction: but you would not believe that any effect could be lasting on the mind of such a boy; and thought it would all pass away with his disease. Indeed, he was at the

time too sick, to allow us to say or think much about it; and since then, though I have thought much, I have said very little.'

'I wonder how I could be so inattentive and forgetful of these things: nor do I understand how you learned all the particulars you have related,' said Mr. Henderson.

'When we first went to the child,' replied Mrs. H., 'his mind was deeply exercised and full of the subject; and he could think or talk of nothing else. When alone with him, I strove in vain to soothe his nerves, and prevent those violent paroxysms which he had been taught to believe were highly beneficial. I avoided all inquiries, and endeavoured to introduce a different train of thought: but it was difficult to do this; especially as your brother and sister, were gratified by the success of their efforts, and were full of the subject of his conversion, both in his chamber, and when we were not with the child. Thus by interrupted details and insulated remarks from all parties, from the irrepressible desire each had to relate the progress and completion of the change, as it was called, I at length gathered all I have told you; notwithstanding I discouraged, as much as possible, all communication on the subject; wishing to give a new and different tone to his feelings, and believing it best for him to forget the past scenes, as soon as possible.'

'I certainly,' said Mr. Henderson, 'never heard the circumstances so related before; if I had, I should not have treated my brother and his wife as I did at the time, and have done since.'

'It was the fear of this,' said Mrs. Henderson, 'that prevented me from dwelling on the subject, and stating, as particularly as I have now done, the course of conduct they pursued with George. When I found you

decided to have him remain there, I considered it best to say no more about the affair.'

'I think you were wrong there,' said Mr. Henderson; 'for if I had made a plain statement of the effects of their conduct upon the child, it might have opened their eyes to the folly as well as the wickedness of their treatment; at least, it would have checked them in any further attempts of the kind.'

'Perhaps I was,' replied Mrs. Henderson; 'but it would not, I thought, have any good effect. Your brother and his wife are both sincere in the opinions they profess; their minds are confirmed in the system they have embraced; and their hearts are so wedded to it, that to admit a doubt of its truth, or to allow the possibility of their being in error, appears to them a heinous sin, for which they should humble themselves in deep contrition before God. They are, in this manner, enclosed and hedged in by their prejudices, as effectually, as if they possessed no rational minds. Any attempt on our part to give them different views, would have no other effect than to cause unkind thoughts of us: and, at that time, it would have given them a conviction, that we were as ungrateful for their affectionate treatment of our son as blind to the truths of religion. Unchristian feelings would have been excited between us, and our social intercourse would have been interrupted, if not for ever broken off.'

'I don't know but you are right,' replied Mr. Henderson; 'and, after all, their conduct may not be all that has caused George's infidel notions.'

'Not their conduct alone,' said Mrs. Henderson; 'others joined in the labour, to aid the good work as it was called. One evening, George went by invitation to visit one of the instructers. When there, the gentleman told him, he had invited him, in order that he might get

religion; and he did not intend to part with him, until he had experienced a change. So he exhorted, and argued, and read the denunciations of the scriptures on the impenitent, telling the child, he was the very individual pointed at; he added prayers to threatenings, till, at length, driven to desperation, George declared himself converted, and was allowed to depart. This deception, on the part of George, weighed heavily on his conscience for a very long time, though I am sorry to say, relief did not finally spring from penitence, but from indifference.'

'More's the pity,' said Mr. Henderson.

George is yet young,' continued his wife, 'and his mind is a candid and penetrating one; it is deeply excited, and full of action. His early impressions and instructions were rational, and I trust he will finally settle down in just views.'

'God grant it may be so,' said Mr. Henderson. 'But I confess I am full of fears.'

'If it were not for my religious trust, I should be full of fears also,' said Mrs. Henderson. 'But I have so earnestly and constantly sought divine aid in training my children, and have made it so much the duty of my life to give them good instruction, that I fully believe our heavenly Father will grant my prayers; and in his own time, and by his own means, produce the state of mind we desire to see in our son. We must, on our part, let patience have its perfect work; for this trial is doubtless for the improvement of our hearts; and we should view it in that light, and manifest a true christian spirit in our conduct to George.'

'You possess at all times more faith, and patience too, than I,' said Mr. Henderson. 'But I approve, and re-

spect, and shall try to emulate your truly evangelical temper, my dear wife.'

'Let us then resolve,' said Mrs. Henderson, 'to guard ourselves against the least appearance of unkindness, in our treatment of the boy. He must be drawn by love and gentleness, and his heart be warmed and opened by generous dealing, and a conviction, that affection dictates our conduct to him. This will give us the fairest chance of overcoming his prejudices, and convincing his understanding.'

'That is the part of wisdom,' said Mr. Henderson. 'But you know it is proverbially easier to preach, than to practice. I am aware of the impetuosity of my feelings. I rarely engage in an interesting discussion, without being excited, and then, to be sure, there is an end of profit or pleasure. I ought not to talk with George on this subject; and I will not, if I can hold to my resolution.'

'I think you are right,' replied Mrs. Henderson. 'On subjects of deep interest, few people can converse calmly and dispassionately; and yet, without such composure, and perfect gentleness of tone and expression, and the utmost candour and impartiality, I am convinced little good is effected by discussion. When unpleasant feelings are excited, the mind will often be unable to perceive the truth of a proposition, be it ever so clear.'

'It may be so,' said Mr. Henderson; 'I have never attended much to these things.'

'You have lived in the world of business, my dear,' said his wife; 'while I, secluded, and moving only in the little circle of my domestic duties, have lived in an internal world of thought, observing and reflecting on the operations of my own mind, and those of the few indi-

viduals, with whom I have daily or occasionally associated. Hence the difference in the character of our minds, which originally, I believe, were constituted very much alike.'

The entrance of company now put an end to the conversation. But it was a subject of deep meditation, and humble petition, that they might be guided by the spirit of wisdom and divine love, in all their endeavours to influence the mind of their beloved son.

Beside the causes which Mrs. Henderson had enumerated to account for their son's deistical opinions, there were others in operation, of which both his parents were ignorant. Or rather, the same causes were operating under different circumstances, for it was still the doctrines called orthodox, which were increasing and confirming George's erroneous opinions. Edward Burrel, a fellow apprentice, and an intimate friend of George Henderson's, had a share in the unhappy influence exerted over his mind. This young man had imbibed some doubts on religious subjects, from various sources; but his notions were crude, and his knowledge of the particulars in dispute trifling, until a young lady, a cousin of his, for whom he had entertained a youthful passion, became deeply affected by a Calvinistic awakening, produced by the labours of an itinerant preacher in a place where she had been visiting. After her conversion, as she termed the state of mind she was in, whenever Edward Burrel visited her, she introduced the subject of religion, and tried to create in his mind feelings similar to those she had experienced from the new kind of preaching she had heard. It happened, unfortunately, either that her cousin required clearer and stronger arguments to convince him, than had been effectual with her; or that those she

adduced, if they originally possessed power, were deprived of it in the process of passing through her mind. Edward Burrel constantly showed himself the better disputant. Yet, though never vanquished, he failed on his part of convincing his fair cousin of her antiquated and superstitious errors, as he called her opinions. This being the case, he resolved to arm himself more thoroughly for the combat; and with that view, read all the deistical and infidel works he could obtain. Thus strengthened in his belief, that no divine revelation had been made to mankind, and confirmed in the opinion, that all things owe their origin to chance, and that annihilation ensues on the dissolution of the body; he renewed the controversy, and had greatly the advantage over his loquacious antagonist.

It sometimes happened when visiting his cousin, that he met a clergyman, who, having learned the change in the lady's sentiments, and seen her at his church, valued such an acquisition too highly to risk losing it by neglect. He therefore called upon her, as frequently as he could ascertain that her father was absent; for he was aware that his visits would not be approved by him, and that the rules of etiquette did not justify his visiting, uninvited, at his house. Whenever he had opportunity, he did not fail to use it, to confirm her faith in the views which she had embraced, and to give her more and deeper prejudices against those who differed from her in opinion. He reminded her that Jesus Christ had declared that he came to "set a man at variance with his own family, and the daughter against her mother," and that "a man's foes should be those of his own household;" and this he assured her would always be the case, when any member of a family was awakened to the truth as it is in Jesus, and became converted; and

should such prove to be her fate, she must rejoice to be accounted worthy of suffering persecution for the sake of her Saviour. He supplied her from time to time with arguments to maintain her warfare with her infidel cousin: and occasionally, when these two champions met, they had a skirmish on the debatable ground. The young lady profited greatly by these conversations, and was thereby enabled to hold on the controversy, beyond all Edward Burrel's expectations. He often invited his friend George Henderson to visit his cousin with him; and was not a little proud to have such a witness to the victories, which he obtained in their polemical discussions. His opponent, as usual, became more dogmatical and pertinacious, the oftener she was convicted of an absurdity, and rendered unable to extricate herself. And she might at length have been discouraged, and disgusted with the unequal contest, had it not been that she sometimes wandered from the defence of the creeds, doctrines, and speculations of men, and stood on scriptural ground; and then the fundamental truths of the christian religion supplied her, from time to time, with unanswerable arguments. The strength these truths afforded her, preserved her confidence in the whole system which she advocated; and left her without a doubt as to the soundness of all her opinions.

It was, on the other hand, the circumstance of her attempting to defend the palpable absurdities of the tenets she had embraced, that served to confirm Edward in the belief, that her whole system was without foundation. Thus each assisted to chain the other's mind in false notions.

George Henderson had been furnished, in his early education by his mother, with such sound arguments to

prove the existence of Deity, and that infinite wisdom and goodness are the attributes of God, that Edward Burrel's atheistical opinions could make no impression on his mind. He had been led from his earliest recollections to perceive and adore the wonderful manifestations of God's love to man, his wisdom and power, in the glorious works of creation and providence; and nothing could efface the deep impression. But the young lady advocated doctrines so evidently absurd, and constantly proved to be so by Edward Burrel, that the result of these conversations, in respect to him, was in unison with his prejudices, and tended to strengthen his disbelief of revelation. His reading confirmed him in these views. 'Edward Burrel,' he thought, 'does not believe enough; there is incontestable proof of a First Great Cause, possessing all possible perfections. Louisa Seymour believes too much; it is absolutely impossible that an infinite can be contained in a finite being; that God, immeasurable, unbounded, eternal, omnipresent, as well as omnipotent and omniscient, could be born in the circumscribed form of man, and be confined to pass a temporal life on earth, and then die. God die! It is a contradiction, not only in language, but in ideas;—it may as rationally be said, that a part is greater than a whole; that time comprehends eternity; that truth is contained in falsehood; and goodness in sin. God remains for ever in his own infinite existence; diffusing, by established laws, his overflowing bounty on his dependant creatures, whom he will ever protect, overrule, and govern, according to his infinite wisdom.'

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EXCUSES

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CONSIDERED.

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EXCUSES CONSIDERED.

The subject of the Communion is one in which it has been thought that Christians, especially the younger classes of them, should feel a deeper interest. I would not lay too great stress on the external ordinances of our religion; but certainly they should receive from us a proper regard; and this, it is to be feared, too many are slow to pay them. I am sometimes apprehensive, that the tendency of the age is to place the positive institutions of religion too low in the scale of christian duty. We talk much, and justly, of the supremacy of the moral virtues; but I am apt to think that, in our admiration and praise of these, we are in danger of undervaluing too much those inferior, indeed, but important duties, which consist in certain ordinances, kindly appointed by the Saviour as the means of spiritual attainments. Very true it is, there is no merit in simply coming to the christian communion. Nor is there any merit in the mere performance of any religious service. But this does not prove that no good springs from it, nor that, by wilful neglect of it, we do not forfeit the approbation of our Lord. "Ye are my friends," said he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." Now what command of his is more positive and unequivocal than — "Do this in remembrance of me." How is it, that any can excuse themselves in disobeying this injunc-

tion? The authority of him who imposed it will not, certainly, be called in question. All believe, I presume, that what Christ commanded, was virtually the command of God. Nothing, therefore, which he has ordained for his followers, can be deemed optional or useless. This, doubtless, all are ready to admit. How, then, do Christians excuse themselves in neglecting the communion service? The answers that have been given to this inquiry are various. Upon some of them I am now to remark; and in doing it, must claim your indulgence for that plainness of speech, which, in the discussion of such topics, is both necessary and useful, and for that directness of address, by which I hope to secure the personal interest of my reader.

I begin with what may be considered a plausible excuse with some — a sort of lurking skepticism. You refrain from the communion because you are not certain it was intended by the Saviour to be perpetual in the church. Now in reply to this, let me say first — suppose the case stronger than yours. Suppose you not only *doubted*, but *knew* that the command in question was not designed to extend to our times as obligatory upon Christians. Would it therefore be best to abandon the communion table? Is it wise to refrain from everything for which we have not a positive injunction? There certainly can be no harm arising from this service. We think it is productive of much good. Why, then, abandon it? Because you think you were not commanded to attend upon it? But you do not act upon this principle in other concerns. You do many good things for which there is in the Scriptures no express direction. Take an instance. You do not wait for a command to celebrate the anniversaries of important political events. You go voluntarily and

joyfully, to these festivals, — and why? Because interesting recollections crowd on you there, and your patriotism is kindled into a brighter flame, and you are made a better and a happier citizen. And can you tell me why you should wait, at all the more, for a command to celebrate the feast commemorative of the Saviour of the world? For myself, command or no command, I would celebrate it — for it puts me in mind of my greatest benefactor, my piety and my benevolence are inspirited with new life, and I am made a better and happier Christian.

Your case, however, is by no means such as I have been supposing. You do not pretend to *know* that Jesus did not design the Lord's supper to be obligatory on Christians of the present time. You only say you have doubts about it. Now, as you are certain no evil can come of the service, and probably some good will result from it, does not wisdom urge you to join in the communion? In this, you cannot but perceive, is your greatest safety, even on the ground of your doubts as to its positive obligation. You may, some time, be convinced of its obligatory nature, and then the thought that you had neglected it will give you pain.

But, may I not ask, in the next place, why it is that you have any such doubts on the subject? That Jesus enjoined the observance of the communion on his *first* disciples, you admit. What reason have you for suspecting that it was intended to be confined to them? Can you cite a single passage from the New Testament which intimates such a design? You cannot. If, then, the Scriptures place no limitation on the Saviour's command, why will you? Is there anything in the *nature* of the ordinance that should lead you to suppose it was to be temporary in the church? No. It is simple, significant,

applicable to Christians in every age and clime, and useful to all who use it well. Consider, too, the *reason* our Saviour gave at the time he appointed it. "Drink ye all of it, *for* this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for *many*" — shed, certainly, not for his immediate disciples alone, but also for the multitudes that were to succeed them. This reason, you perceive, addresses itself to us with as much force as it did to the twelve. What, again, was the *design* of the communion? Remembrance of Christ. "Do this in remembrance of me." And have we less occasion to remember our Saviour than the first Christians had? Have we less need to use the means of calling what he said, and did, and suffered, to our recollection? Besides, did not our Saviour, after his resurrection, say to his disciples, "Go and teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you?" But, had he not commanded them to commemorate him in the communion? Now, as he made no exception as to this ordinance, in his last directions to his disciples, must they not have felt themselves bound to inculcate this, amongst other christian duties, upon their converts? I see not how it could have been otherwise. Was it otherwise in fact? Let us advert to the known opinions and practices of the apostles respecting the Lord's supper. They could not, especially after Pentecost, have been ignorant of the real intention of their Master concerning it. Read the Acts of the Apostles, and you will find it often alluded to. Is there a word in that history implying that it was to be temporary? Not one. On the contrary, it is spoken of as an ordinance of the church, during the period, of which that book professes to give an account; or at least, for the space of nearly thirty years after our Saviour's ascension.

Nor is this all. The question, it seems to me, is settled by the testimony of Paul. He received, as he tells us, his knowledge of Christianity, by special revelation from Jesus Christ. And among the communications made to him from this source, he mentions the account of the Lord's supper. Accordingly, we find him enjoining the proper observance of this rite upon the Corinthians, in his epistle to them. Mark the date of this. It was more than a quarter of a century after the institution of the ordinance. And here is the point to be dwelt upon. If Christ did not intend the rite should continue in the church, why did he, at so late a period, reveal it to Paul? And why did Paul, if he did not suppose it was to be a permanent ordinance, recommend it to the Corinthians, with minute directions as to its proper observance, more than twentyfive years after our Saviour's death; and that, too, without giving a single hint from which anything could be inferred, but that it was to be a standing rite in the church in succeeding generations? It seems to me the conclusion is irresistible.

If any further confirmation is desired, we have the testimony of Justin Martyr, who flourished about forty years after the last of the apostles left the world, that is, about one hundred and ten years after Christ. From him we learn that the Lord's supper still continued to be an ordinance of the church. His words are these: "On the day that is called Sunday, there is an assembly of all who live in the cities, or in the country; and the Acts of the Apostles, and the writings of the Prophets are read, according as the time will permit. The president discourses, instructing the people, and exhorting them to good actions. Then we stand up to pray, and after prayer, bread and wine, with water, are brought, and the president offers

prayers and thanksgiving as he is able, and the people join in saying, amen. Then there is a distribution and a partaking of the things for which thanks were given." Here, you see, the celebration of the Lord's supper is declared by an unexceptionable witness, to be the regular practice of all Christians in the age next succeeding that of the apostles. Ecclesiastical history is full of proof that, from Justin Martyr's time to the present, the communion has been regarded as a permanent ordinance of the christian religion.

Thus I have glanced at some of the topics of argument by which it is proved that the Lord's supper was designed for his disciples of all times. And now, with the solicitude which it is natural for every follower of Jesus to feel, and with the plainness which one christian brother may always use to another, I ask you, why it is that, in our religious assemblies, comparatively so few participate in the elements of that feast, which was intended to commemorate their greatest benefactor? What further excuses have you to offer for the neglect of the communion? State them, and they shall have a candid hearing.

Will you tell me that this service is fenced round with creeds of man's making, so that you cannot conscientiously come to it? In *our* churches no one can say that such is the fact. We have no creed but the Bible. But are there not promises to be made, you ask, perhaps, which will be as shackles upon our minds in our future inquiries? That there are not such in some churches of a different faith from ours, I do not take it upon myself to affirm. But as to our own, I answer, there are no such promises required. A man enjoys as much freedom of thought in the church, as out of it. Every member is left to

be guided, in all things, by the light of his own conscience, just as much after having come to the communion as before.

But shall we not, you may inquire, assume, in the sight of God, some new obligations, by joining the church? Suppose I should say yes, — what then? If they are only the obligations which the religion you acknowledge to be divine, makes it your duty to assume, would you decline them? Would you shrink from any responsibleness your Maker designed you should sustain? Would you escape from the burden of a known duty? This were unmanly, not to say unchristian. But I do not so answer the question. On the contrary, I say that the profession of a religion you believe, implies, in the sight of God, no new obligations. As believers in the divine authority of Christianity, you are just as strongly bound to obey its injunctions before you tell the world of your faith, and join the church, as afterward. Neither the words of your profession, nor the act of your communion, and, I may add, nor both together, can make any difference as to the number of your obligations. It is true, it would be a natural effect of these words and of this act to make you feel more deeply the obligations you were under before. And this is a reason why you should declare the one and perform the other. For who should not wish to feel as deeply as possible the obligations that are upon him, and from a faithful discharge of which he cannot escape with impunity? But as to a man's taking upon himself any *new* obligations by joining a christian church, — it is a mere fiction. A creature of God, living under the full light of christian truth, assume new obligations! It is impossible. The obligations of every believer of the gospel are *now* as many, and as strong, as if he had

proclaimed his convictions to the universe, and had commemorated the death of Christ in every church on the globe.

But will not the eyes of the world be turned on us, if we join the church, you may ask, and will not more be expected of us by our fellow men? I answer, suppose this should be the case, and suppose, too, that it should be an evil. It would be, at the most, but incidental to the performance of a duty And is duty to be neglected for the evil incident to it? But this is not all that may be said to the question. Is it an evil to be so situated as to have the eyes of the community upon us, and to have much expected of us? It seems to me to be an important advantage. It is an additional motive to exertion, and such most of us need. Whose interest is it not to be as virtuous as he can be? And what is more likely to conduce to this end, than the consciousness that the eye of the world is upon him, and that his fellow men expect much from him? What you urge, therefore, as an excuse for neglecting the communion, I should offer as an inducement to the observance of it.

But you fear, perhaps, that should you make a profession of religion, you might dishonor it, by not living up to its principles. And are you certain that you have not made a profession of religion, at least virtually, already? It seems to me that you have, in effect, done so, every time you have joined in public worship. If you concede this, then are you not *now* in as great danger of dishonoring your religion by not living up to its principles, as you would be after coming to the communion? If you do not concede this — if you say that you have, in no sense, professed the religion you believe, — alleging for excuse that you feared you might dishonor it by an unworthy

life, — then, allow me to ask, is it not dishonoring your religion to make no profession of it at all? Is it not disobeying a positive command of the author of it? This excuse strikes me as a strange one. What is it but founding an apology for present disobedience on the fear of disobedience in future? You neglect a known duty to-day, from the apprehension that you may neglect some imagined duty to-morrow. Your fear, it seems to me, should operate in a manner entirely different from this. It ought to bring you to the ordinance immediately. For thus you would not only be honoring your religion now; but you would be doing something, at the same time, to secure yourself against dishonoring it hereafter, since one act of obedience performed, renders another more easy and certain. Besides, if you are sincere in your expression of fear — if you are, in truth, so tremblingly alive to the interests of religion, as to think of neglecting its ordinances, through dread of dishonoring it by your moral delinquences — then, what is to be said farther, but that the very sentiment, which the excuse betrays, is no small indication of your qualifications for the communion. Few persons, it may be presumed, whose solicitude is so awake for the reputation of Christianity, can be unworthy of its privileges, or likely to bring reproach upon its name by an open profession of its truth, and an open participation of its ordinances.

Yet others have disgraced their profession, you say. And what is this to you, except as a source of grief, and a caution against your own misuse of it? That one man abuses a good thing is no reason why others should neglect it. Much less is a known duty to be omitted by us, because our neighbor has performed it badly. True, there are those who have disgraced their profession. But

will you urge this as a reason for your making no profession? Then, you are willing to plead in justification of your neglect in religious matters, what you will not plead in respect to anything else. Have not others abused their riches? But you do not, therefore, refuse to grow rich. Have not others prostituted their knowledge to unhallowed purposes? But you do not, therefore, choose to live in ignorance. Have not others prayed without a spark of true piety? But you do not on that account refrain from prayer. And why will you refrain from the communion because some, it may be, abuse it? Why will you plead in excuse for your neglect of this, what you think not of urging in excuse for anything else?

But you do not think yourselves good enough for the communion. The humility, which this plea often indicates, I respect. It befits us, however, to be on our guard lest our humility be an obstacle to our duty. You say you are not good enough. Do you mean by this that you have no regard to God and Christ — that you love sin better than virtue — that you have no wish to be obedient and holy? Then, indeed, I am of your opinion—you are not good enough for the communion. And I should be of your opinion, also, were you to affirm that you were not good enough to live among men, or to breathe God's air. But you do not mean this. By far the larger portion of those whom I address are, I doubt not, of a very different character. You are believers in Christianity, and it is your desire and aim to obey its injunctions. If so, then you are good enough for the communion. There is no valid reason for your delaying to come to it. Let it be, that you are still imperfect. Who is not so? The service was designed for such. It was intended to be a means of improvement,

which implies perfection. What are the scriptural qualifications for the service? Perfection? No. But belief in Christ and sincere purposes of obedience. Have you these? then delay not to come to the communion.

Yet so, you tell me, do not all your religious friends counsel you. Do not? Why? What reason do they give for advising you to postpone this compliance with the will of Christ? Is it that your opinions do not accord with theirs? The only question with you should be, whether your opinions agree with the teachings of Jesus and his Apostles? It is not to be expected that all Christians should think alike on every subject. Yet that they do not, is no reason why any should be kept from the communion. Is it to be supposed our Saviour did not know that a diversity of views prevailed among his twelve disciples? Nevertheless, he invited them all to his table. But your religious experiences have not been precisely like those of your friends. And do they, on this account, discourage your joining the church? The only question with you, again, should be, do you possess the spirit of your Master? It is no just occasion of alarm and hesitation to you that your feelings have not been the same with others.' It is impossible, in the nature of things, for all persons to have precisely the same experiences — for all are not equally guilty; all have not the same change to undergo; all are not possessed of the same natural temperament; all have not the same knowledge; all are not placed in the same circumstances; nor have all the same means. Now, in view of such diversities, who may presume to pronounce another unworthy of the communion, for not having gone through the full course of his own spiritual exercises? You may be a Christian, and I may be a

Christian, and our neighbor may be a Christian, and yet our experiences may have been exceedingly diverse. In a word, is it your desire and aim to conform your opinions, feelings, and conduct to the standard of the Gospel? then, let not the scruples of your friends, as to your fitness for the Lord's supper, prevent your coming to it.

But it is so holy a service you dare not engage in it. So holy a service! How am I to understand you? Certainly you will not, in this enlightened age, say that any peculiar sanctity is transmitted to the elements of the communion by their consecration to sacred purposes. A holy service! I grant that it is so, and I thank God for it. But in what sense is it holy? Only as its purpose is holy — that is, to make us devout, virtuous, more like Jesus Christ. In other words, it is holy just as all the other institutions of religion are so — viz. for their holy ends. But you do not refrain from these. Why should you from that? There *cannot* be a more holy service than prayer; yet you engage in this, without those feelings of dread and superstitious awe with which you contemplate the communion. There is no reason whatever for the difference. But suppose, for a moment, that it were more holy than the other services of religion — what should follow? Not, certainly, that you should neglect it the more, but that you should give to it the greater heed. Its superior sanctity consisting, according to the supposition, in the larger power of its sanctifying influences, you ought to be proportionably more solicitous to avail yourselves of its advantages. Thus, you perceive, your plea is turned against you. That the ordinance is a holy service is a very good reason why you should observe it, but a very bad reason why you should neglect it.

And so we might be induced to think, you confess, were it not for some passages in the Scriptures that deter us. But what passages, let me ask? I know of none that ought to have this effect. Do you remind me of the fate of him who was found at the wedding feast without a proper garment? But this was not intended to relate to the Lord's supper. Nevertheless, if you suppose it may be so applied, what does it teach you? That you would be safer in staying away from the communion than in coming to it? Not at all. For they who are represented in the parable as slighting the king's invitation and refusing to be present at the feast, were treated with quite as much severity as the unworthy guest. Do you refer me now to a passage in the first epistle to the Corinthians? It is the only one to your purpose in the sacred volume. We will consider it. Paul says, "Whoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord;" — and again, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." The reference and import of these words have been strangely misapprehended. Correctly interpreted, they neither express nor imply anything that should keep sincere believers away from the communion. They were designed to have reference to extreme abuses in the Corinthian church — abuses which it is next to impossible should occur now. It was nothing less than gross intemperance that the Apostle so sharply rebuked. This it was which he meant by their "eating and drinking unworthily;" and as to the phrase, "not discerning the Lord's body," the import of it is — making no proper difference between a commemorative

christian ordinance and a licentious heathen feast. In thus turning the simple and significant service of the communion into a scene of intemperance and riot, they were "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord"—guilty, that is, of treating the memorials of him, or as we might say, his memory, with gross disrepect. And what, according to Paul, was the penalty annexed to this abuse of the ordinance? "Damnation," as it is rendered in the common translation; which, however, Doddridge "thinks the most unhappy mistake in all our version of the Bible." And so perhaps it is. The original word does not here mean what "damnation" commonly signifies with us, any more than it does in James iii. 1, where it is translated "condemnation." But it means *temporal punishment*, such as weakness, sickness, and death, as is evident from the next verse. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you." And this, as the Apostle says, was by way of salutary chastisement, in order that, being reformed by it, they "might not be condemned with the world." Such is the true explanation of the passage in question. It was intended to be local and particular in its application. It was a severe rebuke of a profanation that has never occurred among us, and probably never will. You see, therefore, how little reason there is for any sincere believer in Christianity of the present day to be prevented from coming to the communion, as though it were a rite, which it would be hazardous to approach. Even the Corinthians themselves were advised by Paul, not to refrain from it, but to engage in it with better views and dispositions.

Yet it is a service that requires befitting preparation of mind, and this, you say, you have not leisure to

make. Just as well may the child say he has not leisure for gratitude and love towards his parents. What preparation do you think necessary for this service, which is not equally so for the worship of the sanctuary, for your daily devotions, nay, for every event and duty of your lives? True, preparation is requisite for a proper observance of the ordinance in question. But it is only the preparation which every one ought, and which every good man aims to carry with him into all his avocations. He who is prepared to perform his social duties and to transact his ordinary business in a christian manner, is also prepared to join the communion in a christian manner. To say that you are not prepared for the Lord's supper, is as much as to say you are prepared for no duty. Live as a Christian should live during the six days of the week, and you will have all the preparation that is required for the worthy participation of the Lord's supper on the seventh. He who deserves the christian name is always prepared for the communion, whatever be his social engagements, or the pressure of his business.

Still you hesitate. The thought lurks among your other thoughts, that joining in the communion implies and requires something like an ascetic rigor of manners and life. It seems to you, perhaps, that should you come to this ordinance, you would feel yourselves obliged to forego the pleasure of certain amusements and pursuits, which you have been accustomed to value. And so you would, I should hope, if your pursuits and amusements are criminal. And if they are criminal, why do you not now feel yourselves obliged to forego them? Are not such pursuits and amusements forbidden by

God? and do not his commands reach you just as much in your present situation, as they would, were you connected with the church? But you think your amusements and pursuits innocent and useful. If it be so, then what is there in the communion to prevent you from continuing them? There is nothing in the Lord's supper, nor in any part of Christianity, that forbids what is innocent and useful, by whatever name it is called. Either your occupations and pleasures are innocent, or they are not. If they are innocent, pursue them, and let them be no obstacle to your coming to the table of the Saviour. If they are not innocent, then for God's sake, for your soul's sake, give them up. Think not that they are the less criminal, or the less fatal, because you are not members of the church. In the eye of God, whatever men may fancy, the faults of such as refrain from the communion are fraught with as much guilt, as the faults of those who engage in it.

But our associates will ridicule us if we go to the communion, you say. And has it come to this? Will you confess to me that the fear of a little ridicule shall keep you from an acknowledged duty? Shall the words of a few companions, frail and erring as you know them to be, have more power over you than the words of Jesus Christ? Shall the dread of reproach from human lips be stronger within you than the dread of God's displeasure? Will you sacrifice your spiritual improvement and satisfaction to the love of popularity, which, after all you may not gain, take what course you may? Will you so degrade yourselves as to subject conscience to the ever varying whims of those around you? I cannot believe it. You are not so wanting in moral courage.

You would be ashamed of so miserable a cowardice. No. If you have the heart of a man within you, you would rise above such taunts. Your associates will ridicule you, if you should go to the communion! Then, let me say farther, this very circumstance proves that you have made a very poor choice of associates. They are unworthy of your regard. Ridicule you for doing your duty as a religious being — as a creature of God — as an heir of immortality! You should blush to have any intimacy with such companions. You cannot withdraw from their fellowship too soon. It is a disgrace to be connected with them, even if you have no desire to join the church.

But are we not too young, you are ready to ask, for the duty under consideration? Too young? Whence have you derived this thought? The Scriptures are full of exhortations to early religious culture. And as to the Lord's supper, that valuable means of this culture, there are few historical facts better established than that young persons, nay, children themselves, were admitted to it in the first ages of the christian church. Besides, what is there in the ordinance, that is not at least as well suited to the young as to the old? It is not a mysterious rite, which the youthful mind is unable to understand. Even the child can be made to comprehend its nature and design. Nor is it, rightly viewed, a gloomy service. On the contrary, it is a cheerful one, and perfectly accordant with the joyous feelings, and animated hopes of the juvenile age. Were it calculated to throw the chills and gloom of winter over the spring-time of your life, there would, I confess, be some reason for your avoiding it. But, believe me, it never has this effect but by its abuse.

It was designed to add warmth to your good feelings, and brightness to your prospects. And then, too, how beautiful is the spectacle, when the youthful circle gathers round the table of the christian communion. Even the irreligious are forced to confess there is something peculiarly delightful in such a sight. Yes, if there be among the works of God, any single object more interesting than all the rest, it is one in the bloom of existence — in the full glow of health — when everything is gay and alluring in the surrounding scenes — when the heart is warm, and the spirits buoyant, and the hopes sanguine, — seeking thus early to walk in all the commandments of the Lord, blameless. If there is anything over which the angels of God shed tears of joy, it is this. Nor only so. At what period of life, let me ask, will you be so well able to secure the benefits of the communion as in youth, when your minds are susceptible, and your hearts are tender, and your affections and thoughts are fresh and eager to attach themselves to whatever is fair and amiable? Believe me, the time will never arrive when this service can be made so useful to you as it can now. Everything pertaining to it is peculiarly suited to interest and improve the affections of the young. The longer it is neglected, the less is the benefit to be derived from it. The old cannot so easily enter into its spirit, for their sensibilities are blunted, and much of the early force of their faculties is gone. Delay the duty till then, and you will have, besides, many regrets for time lost, and for opportunities of pleasure and improvement neglected. Delay the duty till then, and the piety and virtue that shall come from it, may also partake of the gloom and melancholy of the season, in which they are produced.

Delay the duty did I say? I beseech you, think of the hazard at which you make this arrangement. Is life so certain, that you may dare to postpone, year after year, what ought to be done now, when the images are before your mind of one after another of your acquaintance cut off in youth? Go, stand by the graves of those who began the last year with hopes as sanguine as yours are now, and repeat *there*, if you can, the resolution to defer a known duty till old age.

The excuses for the neglect of the communion, you have thus seen to be groundless. Can you continue to urge them? I appeal, in conclusion, to your better thoughts and feelings.

I appeal to your sense of fitness and propriety. I would know if there be anything more proper and fit, in itself, than such a remembrance of Christ, as the communion contemplates? or anything better suited to cherish this remembrance of him than eating and drinking together according to his direction? To the first question there is a ready answer in the negative, in every good mind; and as to the second, tell me, if upon a little reflection, you must not confess that some such service as the Lord's supper, is the very thing you yourselves would have thought of, as most suitable for the end it proposes, had you been desired to point out a method of remembering your greatest benefactor?

I appeal to your regard for consistency. You gather yourselves together in honor of other benefactors. You love to keep up a grateful memorial of what they were and did. And shall he, whom you are invited to commemorate, as Christians, and to whom you are immea-

surably more indebted than to any other created being; shall he, of all whom you pronounce great and good, be the only one, you so studiously avoid meeting together to celebrate? It seems to me that a proper regard to consistency should prompt to something different from this.

I appeal to your sense of obedience. Can you feel that you have performed your whole duty, as a disciple of Jesus, while the communion is neglected? Is not one injunction of our Lord as binding as another? It is true, that when ritual institutions interfere with the moral duties, the former must yield to the latter. But when they do not, there is no difference between them in point of obligation.

I appeal to your views of utility. You are not called upon to obey an injunction, the reasons and motives of which you cannot discern. The communion service is a useful one. Our Saviour thought it so, else he would never have enjoined it upon the first disciples. Can it be deemed less useful to us than it was to them? On the contrary, may it not be considered more so? The further removed Christians are, in point of time, from the Author and Finisher of their faith, the greater, one would suppose, must be their need of some such regularly recurring memorial of him. At any rate, the ordinance is salutary in its effects. He who attends upon it, with good purpose of heart, cannot but be in the way of growing better and happier. It is a peculiarly affecting service. We have no other in which the soul derives so important an influence through the medium of the senses. For one solemn moment the world is shut out, and everything invites to useful meditation. Our

thoughts recur to him who spake and died as never man, before or since, spake and died. The best feelings are awakened within us. We form resolutions of new obedience. We return to our homes stronger for virtue and happier than we were. Why will any voluntarily deprive themselves of such a source of improvement and satisfaction?

I appeal to your sentiments of love and gratitude. Who, that has but the common feelings of human nature, is willing to forget the request of a dying friend? What then may we not expect of the Christian of more refined sensibilities? what, especially, in regard to such a friend as Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world? Whose last words should be remembered like his? Whose dying request ought to be so scrupulously obeyed? What indifference, what ingratitude, to say no more of it, is it not to neglect the simple observance, which he, for our benefit, recommended, almost with his very last breath! Call to mind the circumstances of his closing life, and observe how thoughtful he was of his followers, even in the immediate view of a most painful death. I need not recount them to you. They are already present to your thoughts. Were ever circumstances more affecting? Yet, in the midst of them, he collected his disciples, and appointed what he would have us do in remembrance of him. Sacred are the requests of the departing soul. This interesting rite — what is it but the injunction of our dying Saviour? And have we the heart to neglect it? Then we are willing to prove ourselves wanting in that affection and gratitude for him, which we should deem it wrong not to manifest in respect to far inferior benefactors.

But I forbear. My limits would not allow me, even could I think it necessary, to say all that might be said to induce you to perform this christian duty. I therefore leave the subject to your own meditations with the single question — whether, as the cold hand of death presses upon you, you will not think that it had been good for you to have early commemorated the dying love of your Saviour in the method of his appointment?— whether, as you then cast a retrospective look upon the past, you will not find it the occasion of many bitter regrets, that on the ground of such poor excuses, you lived so long disobedient to the sacred injunction, "do this in remembrance of me?"

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A

DIALOGUE

BETWEEN A CHRISTIAN

AND A DEIST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
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A DIALOGUE

BETWEEN A CHRISTIAN

AND A DEIST.

Mr. and Mrs. Henderson had ascertained that their eldest son had imbibed deistical opinions; and they were much distressed by this conviction. They had endeavored to search out the causes which had led to this deplored result; and agreed, that however it had been incurred, there was but one line of conduct to pursue with him. They considered it their imperative duty, in their own example to manifest to him the beauty of holiness and the hope and joy of believing; and only in the spirit of christian love, candor, meekness, and forbearance, to use any efforts to draw the soul of their son from the polluted waters in which they feared it was sinking. Knowing the weakness of human resolution, and the liability of all, to have judgment clouded by feeling, they trusted not in their own strength, but sought divine light to guide them.

Affairs continued in this situation, when on a fine day in June Mrs. Henderson asked her son George if he could be spared from the store to take a ride with her to Nahant. She was in a feeble state of health, and George manifested his usual alacrity in obtaining permission to devote

the day to his mother. The weather was fine, and the season luxuriant. Mrs. Henderson was a true lover of nature; to speak more properly, she delighted in the contemplation of God's works. To her the ride promised pleasure in this way, if in no other. George also found great pleasure in viewing beautiful scenery, and there was to him a bewitching excitement, in the strongly marked features of this little wild and naked peninsula.

George had never in his mother's presence expressed decidedly deistical opinions. With his father he had twice held a long argument, and the result may be gathered from a former part of this narrative. He had no doubt of his mother's having been informed of all he had said: and he had some reluctance to discussing these subjects with her. Yet he thought it would be mean to disguise his sentiments, and would discover a want of independence to shrink from expressing them freely. Mrs. Henderson had previously considered and marked out in her own mind the course she thought best to pursue with her son. If opportunity should favor her wish to produce the desirable change, and she could place his error in its true colors before his mind, so as to give him a clear perception of the part he was taking, she resolved to embrace it; but if she saw no such opening, she would content herself with trying to increase his confidence and affection in her and in his father.

George loved and respected both his parents; and though he had dared to provoke his father's anger, by obstinately maintaining his opinions, he had suffered secret sorrow for his offence, and was glad to find a mediator in his mother, and to assure her of his filial

affection and high sense of obligation to his father. Discovering his feelings here to be such as she wished, after such remarks as she thought would strengthen them, she left conscience to do its own work, and said not a word on the cause of his father's displeasure. George thus became reassured, and cheerful spirits and innocent gayety rendered the first hour after leaving the city a short and pleasant one to both parties.

But when the mind is deeply impressed, whatever may be the tone of its feelings, and however it may resolve to suppress them, it will so color and give character to conversation, as soon to display its state, and reveal the causes which produced it. Thus it was with George and his mother.

"There is something very grand and even sublime in this perpendicular pile of rocks, overhanging as it is, with vegetation; it is beautiful also," said Mrs. Henderson, as they were riding by the romantic scenery near the pretty village of Lynn.

"Yes," replied George, "I always admire these rude and majestic rocks; and the view of the valley too is beautiful, and forms a fine relief."

"The world is full of beauty and grace," said his mother; "and I pity the heart that is insensible to it."

"So do I," replied George. "It is a glorious, magnificent kaleidoscope." George had unwittingly committed himself, in making this comparison;—and his mother instantly caught at the idea implied by it.

"What do you intend to express by that observation?" she asked.

George laughed and, looked a little confused, but said nothing.

"I hope you do not mean to intimate that your aberrations have extended to the degree your words imply;" said his mother. "If you have wandered into the abyss of atheism, your case is more hopeless than I have dreamed of. I pray God, you may not be so far gone in error."

George made no reply.

"You have never before," continued his mother, "indicated, by the slightest expression, a disbelief in a first great Cause; you have always, till now, manifested an entire faith in the existence of God."

"I did not intend to do otherwise now, mother;" replied George. "But that beautiful little invention so admirably illustrates the power of chance, that I was wickedly tempted to make the observation."

"You have probably heard it advanced, by those who fancy themselves atheists, in proof of their doctrine," said his mother.

"I certainly have," replied George; "and I think it a specious argument, to say the least of it."

"It is specious indeed," said his mother; "but it requires little investigation to show its want of soundness."

"Well, I declare it appears to me not so destitute of truth;" replied George. "Those who argue against the power of chance, appeal to our understandings, and ask triumphantly, whether it is possible that a fortuitous disposition of atoms in the universe could ever result in such order and beauty as we see displayed in the natural world; and it does seem impossible that chance should ever dispose them in such forms; yet if they were floating for ages and ages in infinite space, they must constantly be taking some new arrangement, and the possibility of

their being sometimes disposed in perfect order, we must admit; and if we look into a kaleidoscope, we shall be astonished to see how often.—Into this simple tube, a few little, irregular, shapeless things are thrown in confusion, and a person who had never witnessed its wonders, would feel sure that no order or beauty could ever result from shaking them together; yet you know, when lifted to the eye and merely turned round, so as to change the situation of these atoms, as we will call them, and give chance her power over them, we have presented to us, the greatest variety of beautiful forms, disposed in the most perfect order. Now this seems to me to be a very good refutation of that objection to the doctrine."

"Even if it were really as you represent," replied his mother, "I might not be obliged to grant what you assume; for what appears to be chance, may be, and I have no doubt is, according to order established by infinite mind; though human faculties are too circumscribed to compass its extent."

"Well, but," — interrupted George —

"Wait a moment," continued his mother, anticipating his reply.—"I should like to ask you, if there is nothing in the kaleidoscope beside a few shapeless atoms you speak of. Has not an intelligent mind, deeply versed in philosophical principles, been at work to arrange two mirrors in the tube, and dispose them so as to reflect repeatedly each little, irregular thing, and thus give to the whole the appearance, though not the reality, of order and beauty? All that is admirable in that ingenious little instrument is the effect of intelligence operating by means adapted to produce the result which delights us; and deprived of the power which an intelligent mind

has given it, the little, irregular, shapeless things would appear to be irregular and shapeless for ever."

"Well," said George, laughing,—"though I should be compelled to allow that you have destroyed this argument, because I am not able at this moment to refute you; yet that would not be to concede the doctrine, Killing one man, does not annihilate an army."

"I know that very well;" replied his mother; "but killing every man in the army, one after another, does as effectually annihilate it, as if it had one great head which was severed by a stroke of the sabre."

"It was the wish of the tyrant Caligula, that the Romans had but one neck, that he might destroy them by one blow," said George. "But I believe it was not a vainer wish than Christians entertain for the destruction of the host of arguments raised against them. The conquest of that army has never been achieved."

"Indeed, it has, my dear;" replied his mother. "But unfortunately these arguments, which compose your army, though often vanquished, are still led out in battle array, and must be fought and conquered again and again, by the champions of truth."

"I had no intention of provoking a contest, mother;" said George, laughing; "I rejoice as much as you can desire, at every victory obtained over an atheistical argument. I have a full belief in the existence of the Deity, and in his gracious attributes."

"I have always thought so;" replied his mother, in a more cheerful tone of voice; "and I am rejoiced to hear you confirm my impression. A hearty conviction of this fundamental truth is a spark of living fire, which will increase till every doubt of divine revelation will be con-

sumed by it. It cannot remain in a good and sensible mind without producing its natural consequences. It will lead you sooner or later to receive the glad tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ."

"On that subject," replied George, "I could meet you with stronger weapons. I do not, however, wish to engage in the controversy; though I have no doubt I could satisfactorily reply to all you could advance."

Pride of opinion and filial affection were now contending in George's bosom. He loved his mother renderly, and dreaded to give her pain; yet he was strongly attached to the ingenious theory, as he thought it, which he had adopted, and he could not help longing to defend it.

Mrs. Henderson answered very meekly. "Far be it from me, my dear son, to enter the lists with you, I have not the power to convince you by the arguments I might use, that you have embraced erroneous notions: nor have I the smallest desire to attempt it."

I do not know who could, if you could not," said George, a little disappointed.

"If the able theologians who have given their whole lives to these studies, and have written with all the power of first-rate understandings, enlightened by all that can be learned on the subject, if such writers fail to convince you, what arrogance, what folly, it would be in me to imagine that I could offer anything to induce you to change your views!"

"But all these writers you speak of," said George, "were prejudiced persons. They were priests, and contended, as they ought, to defend the cause they had embraced. They would have been fools and cowards to do otherwise. Yet their having fought manfully for their

own side is no evidence that they were on the side of truth. If this were allowed it would prove too much; for in that case, both sides must be acknowledged to be true; which is impossible. You will not deny that infidels have been as zealous as bigots."

"But I should like to know," said Mrs. Henderson "what you think induced those men to embrace that cause in the first place. They were not priests before they were Christians."

"They were either weak men, blinded by prejudice and ignorance," replied George, "or they were hypocrites, and maintained tenets which they did not believe, in order to secure power or independence. Ever since the world was created men have striven for power and influence; and there is no engine they have found so effectual for obtaining and holding it, as that of enslaving the minds of the multitude by religious dogmas."

"It is a melancholy reflection," said Mrs. Henderson, in a pensive tone, "that the corruptions of the pure principles of Christianity have been such, as to oblige the honest mind to admit the truth of your last remark. But if you could look farther into the subject, you would perceive that, beyond all those dark clouds, there is a bright and clear sky, where a risen Saviour still appears, offering his gospel to his faithful followers. But you cannot see this," she added with a sigh.

"No," replied George, "I must confess I cannot; but the other I can see as clear as noon-day; and therefore, I do not think anything a priest can urge has any weight, or ought to have any. If a sensible, intelligent deist should discover arguments strong enough to convince him, and he should meet his former associates in controversy, he might have some claim to be heard."

"But, my dear child," said his mother, "would not your sensible deist, the moment he had become impartial enough to weigh the arguments on both sides candidly, and admit the force of those he had before opposed, would he not at that moment be a Christian, and be classed with your priests and hypocrites."

"No," replied George; "if he had previously been in favor of deism, and opposed to Christianity, and had sincerely labored to support and vindicate his opinions, and no worldly advantage followed the change, I should then think his candor and honesty manifest, and I should be willing to hear what he had to say, and to believe, if his arguments were sound."

"I do not see, then, replied his mother, "but you are bound to examine the scriptures, and weigh their testimony; for certainly you cannot deny that Paul, and Peter, and the other disciples of Jesus Christ, and the early converts, both Jewish and Gentile, were previously, so far as respected his mission, deists, and were zealous to defend their faith; nay, they were highly offended with the doctrines they afterwards embraced; and no worldly advantage, but the contrary, followed their change of opinion. Therefore they established their candor and sincerity by your own test."

"Your argument would be irresistible," said George, "if these histories were true; but unfortunately there is no reality in them. All, which, it is pretended, was written by these good men, is a sheer fabrication. It is all an imposture."

"How many great and good men have believed it!" said Mrs. Henderson.

"They were all blinded, mother," said George, with

increasing confidence; "all under the yoke of ecclesiastical domination; the instruments of priestcraft enveloped their minds in the midnight darkness of bigotry and superstition."

"Poor men!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson, "how I pity them. If Dr. * * *, and Mr. * * *, and Professor * * *, and a host of our own worthies, and a still larger host in Great Britain and on the continent of Europe; for I particularize a few, because you know them personally, and can have no doubt of their talents, integrity, or learning; if this host, I say, of the present and past ages, could only have had" — She suddenly stopped.

"If they could only have had, what?"— asked George.

"I had better suppress what I was going to say;" replied his mother, in a lower and softened tone. "It would only excite your temper, and I should be very sorry to do that."

"Never fear," replied George, laughing.

"Be it upon you then;" said his mother, laughing in her turn. "I was going to say if all these men could only have had the wisdom, the clear perception, the freedom from prejudice — extensive views, sound sense and erudition of George W. Henderson, how much the world would have gained; and how much expense of time, health, and money, might have been saved in their labors!"

George bit his lip — whipped the horse, and looked straight forward. They drove on a few minutes in silence. At length Mrs. Henderson said —"Forgive me, my dear boy, I am so heart-sick, and soul-sick of this deistical flummery, this jargon of presumption and folly, that I am hardly able to repress my contempt — not for the persons who are the dupes of this sophistry; for them,

I feel only regret and sorrow — but for the flimsy support they attempt, I can feel no other sentiment than disgust; it has been repeated and repeated till it is stale and offensive beyond bearing."

"Sarcasm is not argument," said George, tartly; while his lip curled, and his eye flashed fire.

"If sarcasm, by throwing a broad light on the subject, makes the truth evident, it operates like a powerful argument," said Mrs. Henderson. "By contrasting your inexperience, your ignorance of the whole ground in dispute, inferior powers of judging, and all that distinguishes youths like yourself from such men as the learned, the wise, and the good, who have lived since the Christian era, so full a light is thrown on the circumstance of your standing up alone, to pronounce them in error, and yourself the only correct man, that you must see the truth of my assertion, when I call it presumption and folly."

"You ought not to say that I stand alone," said George. "There have been many as learned and gifted men as Christianity can boast, who have denied the facts on which the faith of Christians rests; and who have ably defended the ground of opposition."

"There have been, I allow," replied his mother, "on that side of the question, some writers who rank high as to intellect and attainments, and, at the time they wrote, they dazzled the world with their talents. But few, if any of them even pretended to an acquaintance with biblical criticism; and there is a ready solution of their scepticism, in the moral perversion of some, in the strength of early prejudices in others, and in the misfortune of never meeting with rational and candid opponents.

Revelation was presented to their minds enveloped in falsehoods, and they threw it away in disgust, without an impartial examination."

"I should doubt that," said George; it could only be a fool or a villain, who could treat the subject in that way."

"I am rejoiced to hear you express such an opinion, my son;" said Mrs. Henderson, "and I earnestly hope you will prove its sincerity by such a deep and persevering investigation, as shall entirely emancipate your head and heart from error. But I assure you that neither Hume nor Voltaire, the two great champions of deism in their respective countries, by their own confession, ever read the scriptures, much less studied them, as they should such ancient documents, with careful comparison, and minds freed from a desire to condemn them. Unfortunately for the young of all ages, the greatest minds are not always accompanied with the purest hearts. That deistical writers were men of genius, is no evidence therefore, that they were pious or virtuous."

"Neither are they proved to be wanting in piety and virtue, because they wrote in defence of deism," said George.

"I think I may convince you that such writers, if men of talents, were thus wanting;" said Mrs. Henderson. "But I will leave it for another opportunity; at present your mind is not in a state to perceive the truth of many things which it will, I hope, ere long be willing to receive."

Mrs. Henderson would now gladly have dropped the subject, for she feared her son would be weary of it; and she thought it wiser, that truth should come slowly and

surely, than that by pressing it too long or abruptly, she should incur the risk of increasing his disgust for the investigations she wished him to make. But George, as is usual in such cases, was ardent in pursuit. Not that it was truth exactly, which he sought; though he, like most others in a similar predicament, persuaded himself, it was that alone he desired. He loved to argue; and he loved to gain victories. "At any rate," said he, "you will allow that I do not stand alone."

"Why comparatively, George," replied his mother; "for the whole number you could bring on your side would seem inconsiderable, when opposed to the host of believers."

"The argument ought not to rest on the talents, or ingenuity, or numbers of men who advocate it," said George, "but on its own internal strength. Truth is immutable, and must defend itself."

"Truth, they say, lies in a well," said Mrs. Henderson, playfully, "and if so, we must have men experienced in diving to bring it up."

"Agreed," replied George; "but when it is brought up, it should be able to manifest itself, and not require advocates or interpreters."

"Let it only be displayed in its native dignity and beauty, and it will need no extrinsic aid," replied his mother; "it will be embraced by every pure heart, every unsophisticated mind. But, unfortunately, too many have clothed truth in garments of their own making; and while each has invested her with a different attire, and contended about her, as if the drapery was a constituent part of herself, the simple beauty and majesty of her form can no longer be discerned. So that many people,

who are ignorant of all this ill treatment, believe that it is only a pile of old fashioned and cast off apparel they are viewing, and will not believe that truth, bright and beautiful, is to be found underneath. All these investments must be stripped off -- and every false covering laid aside by those who wish to contemplate divine truth in her native splendor."

"I am sure that is what I wish to do," said George; "and it is for that very reason I have been studying so many books; and investigating the subject of religion with so much earnestness. There are not many of my age who have thought and read as much as I have to obtain the truth; and I should think that would convince you that I am neither presumptuous nor foolish. I never had such epithets applied to me before, and I assure you, I did not find it easy to bear the imputation."

Mrs. Henderson answered with solemn emphasis, though in a tone of gentle affection. "Until you have looked deeply enough into your own heart to perceive that you, like all others, are disposed to be presumptuous, till you can be sensible that the weakness of your mind amounts even to folly, until you feel yourself to be as nothing, compared to the Deity whom you acknowledge and worship, you can be in no fit state of mind to seek truth sincerely, or embrace it when presented to you."

"I have never imagined anything depended on the state of my own mind, in relation to this subject:" said George. "I cannot conceive why I am not at all times in a proper state of mind to seek truth, and embrace it when presented to me; that is, when I am not too gay and happy to fix my attention upon such subjects."

"This is a subject, my dear son," said Mrs. Hender-

son, "on which I wish to talk with you. On the state of your own mind you have not thought much, and as yet know very little about it. Let us leave the whole field of polemic divinity to those who are properly qualified to explore it; neither you nor I are prepared for such a labor. Your knowledge is quite circumscribed; and the little you have is altogether on one side of the subject"—

"You are mistaken there, mother," interrupted George, "I think I know a little of both sides."

"My knowledge also," continued Mrs. Henderson, without noticing George's contradiction, "is necessarily extremely limited; and is nearly as much confined to the affirmative side as yours to the negative. We might therefore dispute for years, without either convincing or enlightening the other. But every body can look into his own heart. Every body can reflect upon his own thoughts; and study his own feelings, and in this way we can all come at some truths which it is important we should all possess."

"I confess I know very little upon this subject," replied George, "nor do I understand how it can have any bearing on the points in question."

"It has so much bearing upon them, my dear," said his mother, "that if the heart is not in a right state to receive truth, especially religious truth, the strongest arguments in its favor will be as much thrown away, as water spilled upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up. It was this fact to which Jesus Christ alluded, when he said, 'if ye believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither would ye believe though one rose from the dead,' meaning, if the heart is not in a right state to receive the truths already offered, neither would it be able to receive greater evidences of truth."

"I don't know how I am to find out whether my heart is in a right state or not," said George; and he added laughing,—"I hardly know whether I have got any heart."

"Perhaps it will assist you in making discoveries, if I ask you a few questions respecting your thoughts and feelings," said his mother.

"Very well," replied George, who was at bottom an ingenious youth, "I am sure I am willing you should ask as many questions as you please; and I will answer as well as I know how."

"Tell me then," said Mrs. Henderson, "what are your feelings respecting this question of a revelation from God by his Son Jesus Christ."

"My feelings!" repeated George, "I have no feelings about it, that I know of."

"You said you wished to know the truth, and have been reading a great deal to find it," said Mrs. Henderson.

"Well I am sure I do wish to know the truth," replied her son; "and you know I have read till I was tired of reading on the subject."

"Do not our wishes indicate our feelings?" asked his mother.

"Oh I understand you—yes, certainly," answered George; "and I say then, my feelings are, if the Christian system is true, I should be glad to know it."

"And do you really believe that to be the case, George?" asked his mother.

"Certainly," he answered.

"And in that case, you feel ready to embrace it, and acknowledge yourself a disciple of Christ?" said Mrs. Henderson.

"Of course, if I find it true," replied George, in a hesitating tone.

"Suppose for the sake of argument," said his mother, "that in conversation with some learned and good man, he should be able to offer you a train of facts, substantiated by evidence that you could not question, and a course of reasoning that would place the truth of the Christian revelation, and the histories of it by the Apostles, beyond further dispute, and render it so clear and convincing to you, that you could no longer withhold your assent, or find an objection to make; would you in that case feel rich in the conviction that you had received a guide for your future faith and conduct, and that the means to attain heavenly happiness were provided in the precepts and doctrines of Jesus Christ? Or would you feel a lurking disappointment, that you had been vanquished in argument, and mentally go over the ground again, anxious to find some new argument which you had neglected to urge, or some flaw in his statement, that would give you again the advantage."

George appeared to be reflecting for some time, and made no reply.

"Do you think you can judge fairly, what would be your feelings in such circumstances?" asked his mother.

"I do not know that I can," he replied. "It is a new thought to me; I never conceived of such a possibility, and therefore never considered what effect it would have on my mind."

"But you can, by a little reflection, imagine yourself in such a situation;" said his mother, "and cannot you imagine how you should feel, and what you should say."

"Of course," said George, "if I entered into a controversy with any one, I should try with all the strength

of my reasoning powers, to maintain my ground. I should be wrong, if I did not."

"But after you had put forth all your strength, and brought forward all your objections to the facts he alleged, and had advanced all your arguments to support your own side, if you were still met with stronger and better sustained evidences in favor of that system,—what then?" said Mrs. Henderson.

"Why then I should acknowledge myself conquered, I suppose," said George.

"Reluctantly?—or cordially?" asked his mother.

"Why it is not very pleasant to be put down, and proved to be in the wrong, let us advocate what we will," said George.

"That depends upon the state of our feelings in relation to the subject," said his mother. "If you had picked up a stone in your rambles, and was about throwing it away again, and some one told you it was a gem of great value,—a diamond of the first water, and would make your fortune; you might not readily believe it, you might be afraid of being imposed upon; you might think it very improbable; or it might appear impossible; you would state all your doubts, and raise every objection, and bring forward every argument which appeared to you to disprove it;—but you would not find it very unpleasant to be put down, and proved to be in the wrong."

"Certainly I should not;" replied George, laughing.

"But you would not have the same feelings, in case it should be proved to you that the christian system is true?" said Mrs. Henderson.

"I cannot say I should," replied her son.

"Can you then deny that your feelings, your heart, is engaged on the side of deism?" asked Mrs. Henderson.

"I cannot acknowledge it;" replied George, hesitatingly. "Why should I feel any predilection for one side more than the other? I have always believed myself entirely impartial, and cannot conceive that I am not."

"You must decide that point yourself, my son;" replied his mother. "If you feel sure that you would not be sorry to be convinced you have been advocating an error, if you would not be glad to maintain your cause, and even to convince those opposed to you; there is no doubt that truth alone is the object of your pursuit, and that when it is fairly presented to you, it will be cordially received. But if, on examining your heart, you do not find that such would be your feelings, it must be evident to you, as it is to me, that you argue for victory, and not for truth, and that you will shut your eyes to whatever opposes your opinions, whenever it is possible."

"Allowing my mind, for the sake of argument, to be in the state you suppose it — what do you think I ought to do?" asked George.

"I should advise you, my dear," replied his mother, "in the first place, to examine the effects on the human character, of the two opposite opinions; and to ascertain as far as you can, which belief, fully acted upon, is most conducive to the happiness of this life. If it should appear to you, after such a deliberate examination, that mankind universally need such a faith in a superintending providence as the gospel discovers to us, to reconcile them to the trials of life; if they require the restraints which a conviction of a future state of rewards and punishments imposes; if they are supported under suffering, by the promises of God; if this system is calculated to improve, elevate, and purify character; if, in short, it greatly increases happiness, and diminishes sorrow, even

in this world, setting aside the internal evidence this fact would afford of its divine origin, should you not think it highly desirable, that mankind, whether the system be true or false, should be induced to give a full and hearty credence to it?"

"Most certainly;" replied George, if such could be the fact. But it is a fundamental principle in moral philosophy, that falsehood cannot really increase happiness, but on the contrary, must destroy it, first or last. And this is one reason for trying to induce people to give up the delusion which charms them so much."

"That is begging the question," said Mrs. Henderson.

"How so?" asked George.

"By taking it for granted that the christian system is a falsehood; which is the point at issue," replied his mother. "You must not assume points in this way; but simply inquire what is the fact, whether a belief in the gospel be desirable or not. Can you not inquire what are the advantages or disadvantages of the christian faith, as it respects our condition in this life?"

"Why certainly that can be done," said George.

"Well my dear," replied his mother, "that is what I wish you to do in the first place, as candidly and impartially as you can. When you have taken time to weigh this question maturely, I think you will perceive that it is desirable that mankind should believe in divine revelation. You will see that such a belief must conduce to their temporal welfare; if so, you will also perceive that no person of kind and benevolent disposition would ever desire to utter a word tending to raise a doubt in the mind of a believer; and you will resolve henceforth to hold your opinion in silence and secrecy, if you continue

to believe that your superior intellect enables you to see farther and deeper and higher than all the christian world, and that you know to be false what they receive as divine truth. When you can feel and resolve thus, and not till then, will your mind be in a fit state to examine on what evidence the christian faith rests."

George made no reply to these remarks, and his mother after a short silence added — "We will dismiss this subject now, for I find there is too much excitement in the prospect, to allow the mind to dwell on anything else."

George did not feel satisfied with the turn the conversation had taken; nor with the situation in which it left him. He was somewhat tired of the subject, which his mother perceived, and on that account had changed it for a lighter one; still he did not like to leave the argument resting in this manner. He was not easy in his new predicament, but he saw no ready way to extricate himself, and therefore acquiesced in his mother's proposal of suspending the conversation. They soon arrived at Nahant, where they found a numerous company, and a new and livelier train of thought took possession of his mind.

When his mother after dinner retired to her chamber to refresh herself by a little sleep, George rambled out alone among the rocks, and indulged his disposition to muse. He tried to comply with his mother's request, and to discover the advantages that would result to him if he could be convinced that the christian religion was founded in truth. But this was a new subject of investigation; he had never thought upon it, and was quite unprepared to look deeply and thoroughly into it. His reasonings and his facts had been altogether in another path. To meet the arguments of those who defend the system,

and to oppose to them, all he had been able to collect, or could himself suggest, had been his aim and his habit; and any other mode of examining the subject, he had not attempted. At one time he resolved, that he would modestly acknowledge to his mother his inability to comply with her wishes, and request her aid in pointing out the benefit, in our temporal state, of a belief in Christianity; but his pride revolted at such an idea, and he at length determined he would take longer time to consider the subject and say nothing more respecting it at present.

In this state of mind, after tea, he brought the chaise to the door and handed his mother into it. She had no intention of alluding again to religion. If she excelled in any talent, it was in watching nicely the state of feeling of those with whom she associated; and in a delicate tact, that enabled her to adapt her treatment to the ever changing and complicated tone of their spirits, and the degree of light, at the moment beaming on their understandings. The conversation during their ride home was various and pleasant. Mrs. Henderson manifested her usual affectionate attentions to her son; entertained him with anecdotes of her early days, a theme always delightful to the young; encouraged him by acknowledging and approving his good qualities; listened with complacency to his gay and juvenile remarks, and repressing the disposition, often so strong in maternal bosoms, to reprove and give advice, she strove to render the excursion so pleasing as to leave on his feelings a happy impression.

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DIVINE

REVELATION ADVOCATED

AND ILLUSTRATED.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
A DIALOGUE ON PROVIDENCE, FAITH AND PRAYER.

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It is hoped that the writer's object in the series of dialogues, of which this is one, will not be misunderstood. To bring forward the Evidences of Christianity was not a part of the main design. It has been observed, that few persons whose minds are poisoned by deistical views, are so happy as to meet with individuals or books, who candidly examine into the state of their feelings, or urge on them the importance of doing it themselves. The peculiar circumstances in which they were placed in early life, the false notions combined with their first instructions in Christianity, the imperfect preparation of their hearts, the influence of deistical companions, while they were ignorant of the grounds of true Christian faith, and many other particulars are overlooked or disregarded; and prejudices are confirmed and feelings irritated, by contemptuous expressions and positive contradictions, and by denying to such persons, solely on the ground of their religious opinions, any claim to esteem or respect. To mark out a line of conduct that might, with more justice and with greater prospect of success, be adopted by those, who are so unfortunate as to have deistical friends or acquaintances, is the simple and humble object of these dialogues.

BOSTON,
Press of Isaac R. Butts.

DIVINE REVELATION

ADVOCATED AND ILLUSTRATED.

George Henderson had an affectionate disposition; on which the system of deism embraced by him had not yet produced its benumbing and selfish effects. Yet he could not at once yield himself up to the train of thought proposed by his mother. She had desired him to look deeply into his own heart, and to examine, both in regard to himself and to mankind at large, how a faith in the christian religion might be expected to affect temporal happiness. She was indeed aware that his mind was not properly prepared for this investigation, either by a sufficient collection of facts, or by a just method of viewing those he possessed; but she wished him to discover his own ignorance and inability, before she offered to assist him. She was not anxious to produce a sudden change in his views; for she thought it much better to wait the gradual unfolding of his own thoughts and feelings. As he paced up and down the Mall at the soft twilight hour soon after his ride to Nahant, he resumed the subject and endeavored to comply with his mother's request. But pride, prejudice, and ignorance still combined to stimulate him to maintain his chosen system. "What need have I," he said, mentally, "of a belief in

Christianity to make me happy; I am sure any change in my opinions on this subject, would render me far less happy than I now am. I know to my cost what happiness there is in being a Christian. I believed once, and the very recollection of those sad years never fails to give me horror. And how much happier are my uncle and aunt, than they would be without any christian faith? Their whole life is a contention between natural vivacity and religious gloom. The fact is," continued he, "the only rational religion is the one I have chosen; the middle line between atheism on one side, and revelation on the other. I acknowledge the morality of Jesus Christ to be far purer, and more perfect, than that of any other philosopher; but it may be adopted as a rule of life without believing that he received it immediately from God: or that the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth stooped down from his ineffable glory to enter into the body of a man in order to become an infinite sacrifice, to appease his own infinite wrath and reconcile his infinite justice with his infinite mercy. Such doctrine is nothing less blasphemy, and I cannot and will not degrade the character of the Deity or my own understanding by believing it. If there is any one attribute of mind displayed in the world around us, it is pure disinterested benevolence; to this I will hold, and this I will adore, let Christians say what they will. I may appear obstinate to my father and mother, and I am sorry for it, but it is only fair, that I should be allowed to have an opinion of my own; and to express it too, as independently as they express their's." Thus confirming himself in his infidel notions, as his father called them, he waited only another opportunity to meet his mother on her own ground and to contend, that mankind could not derive any real benefit from a belief in Christianity.

Mr and Mrs Henderson watched with intense interest the tone of their son's feelings; and made it a subject of daily prayer, that infinite wisdom would devise the means of drawing him, by the cords of love and by the bands of social affection which unite man to man, to see the beauty of holiness and to feel the enlivening power of faith in a Redeemer. George did not fail to try to engage his mother in another religious conversation, fully confident that he should now be able to manage the argument which she had suggested. He felt a little afraid of his father, dreading to excite his anger. But both his parents seemed disinclined to religious discussion; and when he purposely sought to engage his mother, she evaded the contest; always assuring him, in a gentle tone, that religion was much more an affair of the heart than of the head; that when she should be able to perceive that his affections were holy, his mind humble, his heart contrite, and his soul devoted to God and his duty, she should be persuaded he was not far from the kingdom of heaven; and that she should leave him to the Deity in whom he believed, to overrule and correct his opinions by such discipline as he should see best adapted to his case.

"How is it," thought George, at one time when he had been checked in this manner, "that if I touch on the subject of religion, my mother always makes me feel as if I had been defeated? She has such a way of turning from the point, I wish to keep in view, and of saying something foreign to what I expected, that I never know how to be prepared for her."

"I wish," said he to his mother, one day when they were alone, "I wish, mother, you were willing to talk with me sometimes on religious subjects. I very often go to church with you, because I know you desire it, and it

seems but fair that you should be willing to hear what I can say to defend myself."

"There is no occasion for defence, when you are not accused, my son," replied his mother. "I think religious disputes are unfavorable to the temper and heart; and the attempt to convince does often but confirm the mind in false views. I will at all times cheerfully converse with you on every subject that can afford you profit, or innocent pleasure; but I fear your mind is not yet in a frame to canvass religious subjects either profitably or innocently."

"Not innocently, mother?" asked George.

"No; if it be only to confirm your present opinions it will not be innocent, because it will injure your heart and temper, and therefore greatly harm you," said Mrs Henderson.

"How is it possible you can think it will harm me to believe what reason renders clear? Truth cannot harm, can it?" asked George.

"Truth cannot injure by itself," replied his mother. "But when some truth is combined with a great deal of falsehood, so that we cannot separate them, the truth itself may injure by inducing us to receive the falsehood with it."

"It appears to me," said George, "that you now state exactly the cause why the christian system is embraced by so many; a great deal of falsehood and absurdity is mixed with some truth, and the whole is received together."

"Can you separate them," asked his mother, "so as to show me distinctly what are the truths and what the falsehoods of Christianity in your opinion?"

"I can state very easily what I esteem the falsehoods

and the absurdities of the system," replied George; "but I am not sure I can so readily find the truths; though, I am willing to allow there are some; else it could not have deluded so many."

"It would be best then," interrupted Mrs Henderson, "to defer our conversation till you have examined the subject so carefully, as to be able to see distinctly what you believe, as well as what you disbelieve in it. In the mean time, I wish you to accompany me to Dorchester this afternoon. I have heard that the old lady whom I go every summer to visit, has been very sick, and I am desirous to learn exactly her situation; and carry her some articles which she has not the means of obtaining."

"Whom do you mean?" asked George, "you have so many strange acquaintances, that I cannot tell to whom you allude."

"I wish I had many such friends as the widow Brown," replied his mother. "Have you not been there with me?"

"Yes, once, when I was very young," answered George. "I shall never forget how she looked."

"How did she look to you, George?" asked Mrs Henderson. "To me she always looked like the picture of christian resignation."

"Oh she looked dreadfully to me;" replied George. "Her eyes were so red and her hands twisted and drawn awry; and altogether I thought her a most miserable object."

"Did you not pity her?" asked his mother.

"Certainly;" he replied. "But then it is very disagreeable to see such people."

"But would you not submit to that disagreeable feeling for a little while, to alleviate the sufferings she must endure?"

"Oh yes, if I could help her," answered George, "to be sure I would go; but what good can I do her?"

"If you cannot do her good," said Mrs Henderson, —"which is not certain, for she loves all who are dear to me, and would be pleased to see and talk with you;—I am sure she would be gratified by a visit from me; and while I stay with her, she may be so much amused and interested, as to forget her troubles."

"Then I am sure you are right to go," said George.

"But I cannot go without you, my son," said his mother. "You know your father cannot leave his business without great inconvenience; and there is no one else, excepting you, with whom I am willing to trust myself in the chaise. You have no engagements for the rest of the day; you told me so before dinner."

"Dear mother," interrupted George; "pray do not say so much about it, I will go with pleasure; the ride will be delightful, if the visit be irksome."

They were soon on their way to the beautiful village of Dorchester.

"Now let me tell you a little of the history of the good lady we are going to visit," said Mrs Henderson, as soon as they had escaped from the pavements.

"Well," replied George, "what has she done or discovered, to render her celebrated?"

"Nothing in the world;" replied Mrs H. "She is one of those unobtrusive, humble characters, who think they have no claim on the notice or regard of any; but who engage the esteem and veneration of all who know them. Her life has been a series of sufferings and sorrows; and for the last twenty years, there has never been a period when she did not endure privations and distresses

that would have induced most persons to think life a burden."

"And how has she sustained these troubles?" asked George.

"With uniform patience, resignation, and cheerfulness," replied his mother; "always saying she still received more blessings than she deserved. Though crippled by the most painful disease, quite unable to walk, and having but a partial use of her hands, by unwearied diligence and industry in such occupations as she could perform, she has contrived to earn the little pittance necessary for her support, that she might not be a burden on her needy and unfortunate children; and gratitude to those who would thus employ her is the only sentiment she has ever been heard to express on the subject. Though her soul has been distressed by seeing three daughters, justly dear to her, enduring the miseries that fall on those who have intemperate husbands, yet the voice of complaint or reproach has never been heard from her. Always resigned, always grateful, always cheerful, her docile mind has yielded to the circumstances in which she has been placed, as a child receives the instructions of its parent."

"She must be a remarkable woman," said George.

"She is a bright and shining light in the path of Christianity," said Mrs. Henderson, "for all this is the effect of religion in her soul; but though remarkable, she is not singular. The humble and lowly disciples of Jesus Christ shrink from observation; and they are not believed to exist, because they are ever unobtrusive; like some rich and delicate fruits, which, when ripest, are hidden under the more ostentatious leaves. The fruits of the spirit are meekness, gentleness, forbearance, and

charity; and there are many pure souls bearing these rich fruits and combining them with the joy and hope of believing, who are known only to the little circle where they move. Would you be willing to deprive them of these sources of comfort?" asked Mrs Henderson.

"I, God forbid!" exclaimed George. "If they find comfort in believing in Christianity, I am the last person who would undeceive them."

"I fully believe you, my dear," said his mother. "I know too well the sympathy and tenderness of your heart, to believe that you would intentionally throw the shadow of doubt over that faith which is the only hope and consolation of such afflicted persons, could you apprehend at the moment the consequences of such an act. Can you not perceive also, that it is a manifestation of divine benevolence, that God gives to his dependent creatures such a faith, as a solace, when the world holds out no joy or comfort for them?"

"I cannot conceive it to be benevolence in the Deity to allow his creatures to be soothed by a delusion, which will only leave them in deeper gloom, when they discover the mistake," said George.

"Nor can I," said his mother; "and seeing he does permit so many sons and daughters of affliction to be made resigned and contented by this faith, I think it is one proof that it is a true faith; for by denying this we impeach the goodness of God, which is breaking up the foundation of all our religious opinions. Natural as well as revealed religion rests upon this fundamental truth."

"That is just my opinion," said George. "Nothing should be admitted that would impair this great and glorious attribute of God. It is on this that I take my stand; and I reject the christian dogmas because they are incompatible with this adorable quality."

"If that were a fact," said Mrs Henderson, "I confess that I should, like you, have been indisposed candidly to weigh the evidences of the christian system. But if, on the contrary, they perfectly coincide, and no other view so entirely establishes the benevolence of the Deity, you will allow, that this alone would be a presumptive evidence in its favor; would you not?"

"That is the very point at issue," said George. "That involves a great deal: if the system is true—it is true, I am ready to grant."

"You do not state the matter correctly," said Mrs Henderson. "You do not believe in divine revelation; and one cause is, that to your apprehension it is inconsistent with the goodness of God. I, on the contrary, believe in revelation, and to my mind it is one of the greatest evidences of that infinite benevolence, which we agree in thinking the highest attribute of God. Now if it can be proved that divine benevolence is manifested in revelation, though in so doing its truth is not proved, one of the greatest obstacles to your receiving it will be removed; you will no longer be reluctant to give its evidences a fair examination."

"But how is it possible," asked George, "that any one can even pretend to reconcile with infinite benevolence, the conduct which Christians believe God has adopted towards his creatures?"

"My dear son," replied Mrs Henderson, "you have fixed in your mind, as I told you before, a series of opinions which you believe to be the christian system; and which combines a great many falsehoods with important truths. These false doctrines are in many respects utterly at variance with the principles of divine benevolence. While you regard these notions as the doctrines of reve-

lation, you can not reconcile your mind to the belief that God is its author. You must release your mind from all former ideas of the Gospel, and take it up simply as it is given in the New Testament. Study it deeply; compare the several histories; illustrate and explain one passage by another on the same subject. Take into view the design and object of every part; and rationally weigh and consider all you read, keeping in mind the time, place, circumstances, and characters of all concerned. Then reason upon the subject as connected with the character of God, and the nature and happiness of man, and you will perceive its perfect harmony with both. After that, verify the account by a comparison with historical evidence and previous prophecies, and thus your understanding will be convinced, and your feelings will yield to your convictions. You will then be prepared to feel its efficacy and to perceive your own want of it. You will wish to become a sincere christian, and will pray for it earnestly. Then will the sun of righteousness arise in your heart, and the day-spring from on high will visit you, and you will begin to taste the hope and joy of believing."

"Ah! my dear mother," said George, "I fear it will be a long time before your reprobate son will arrive at that desirable point of faith."

"I hope not, my dear;" said his mother, pensively. "But if it be so, I pray, that your father and mother may be enabled by the grace of God, to view it as a necessary trial for them, and conduct under so heavy an affliction with that temper of meek, submissive, and gentle forbearance, which becomes their christian profession; and which was manifested and enjoined by our blessed Saviour."

George was touched to the quick by this observation of his mother; but it was compunction of conscience and grief of heart, and not anger or pride, that now swelled his bosom. They rode along in silence until they arrived at the little cottage of the widow Brown. On an occasion when this unfortunate woman had lost her little all of worldly goods, by a fire that sent her and a young daughter, both sick, into the street, destitute even of clothing, on a most inclement day of the most inclement season, this small and simple tenement had been erected for her by the kindness of her many friends. Though boasting of no beauty in itself, it was beautifully situated, and neat and inviting in all its aspects. They were met on entering the house by a young daughter of Mrs Brown, whose eyes were red with weeping, and whose air and manner were solemn and sad, though composed.

"I am glad you are come," she said. "Mother has often mentioned you."

"I heard only to-day, that your mother was sick," said Mrs Henderson, "but understood she was recovering; is she worse again?"

"She had a relapse a week ago," replied the young girl, "and she was struck with death at eight o'clock this morning."

"I am sorry I did not know all this," said Mrs Henderson. "It would have been a privilege to have been with her every day. Does she suffer greatly?"

"Very little now;" replied the daughter. "She has endured great pain and distress of body, but now nature seems to be subdued. We have all been with her to-day; and she has talked to all of us; I wish you could have heard her."

"I wish so too, Mary," said Mrs Henderson to the weeping girl. "May I go in now?"

How repugnant to youth are the idea and appurtenances of death! "Perhaps we had better return, mother," said George.

"Oh no, indeed," said Mary to Mrs Henderson; "mother will know you, I dare say; and am sure she will like to see you. My brother has just been praying with us, and we are all calm now."

Mrs Henderson, followed by her son, entered softly into the humble apartment, where lay the dying Christian, surrounded by her children. To those accustomed to the luxuries of house and furniture, there would have been nothing presented to view in this room which seemed comfortable, except its perfect neatness. But whose is the heart, that, at such a moment, could draw comparisons. The solemnity, the deep interest, the levelling of all human distinctions, and indifference to all earthly gratifications, which a death-bed scene produces, strike too powerfully on the heart to allow any other impression to keep its hold at the time. The light was partially excluded; yet sufficient was admitted to show the ghastly countenance and emaciated body of her who occupied the low bed, that had been drawn, for the convenience of air and attendance, into the middle of the little bedroom.

"Here is our good friend Mrs Henderson, mother," said Mary, stooping and wiping the gathering mists of death from her mother's waxen forehead. The widow Brown opened her deep sunken eyes, and while she fixed them intently on Mrs Henderson, she slowly extended her crippled and withered hand; and her stiffened features relaxed in a faint smile.

"I have been wishing and expecting to see you," she

said, in a low tremulous voice; "you have been so kind, so constant a friend for so many years, I thought you would not forget me at this time; and I felt as if it would be a comfort and a blessing to see you and thank you once more."

"I am very sorry I did not hear of your sickness before," observed Mrs Henderson.

"Oh do not be sorry," replied the dying woman. "All is right. You are too feeble to do more than just look at me, and comfort me by your kind words and smiles. I have wanted for nothing. Never was a poor worthless being more blessed than I am, in children, and friends, and all things needful to body and mind. Every body is kind and good to me; I have only to sing of the mercies and goodness of God, in my life and in my death."

"Do you feel that you are going to leave us, my dear friend?" asked Mrs Henderson.

"I do indeed," replied the good old lady; while a beam of light seemed for a moment to irradiate her deathly countenance. "It is the privilege of a Christian, Mrs Henderson, to rejoice in death. To me this is the happiest hour of my life; and the certainty that I cannot remain long is a blissful thought."

"Mother has given us all comfort," said one of the sons, "by the delightful state of mind she has been blessed with during her sickness."

"She has always manifested a true christian spirit," said Mrs Henderson.

"I have no boast to make," said Mrs Brown. "The face of death drives all vanity and disguise from the heart, and shows us plainly what we are. What I am, if good, I am by the grace of God. It has been my happy portion to enjoy the blessing of a contented mind, and

the assurance of a christian hope, which has supported me through a life that would otherwise have been dull and wearisome by reason of trouble. But I have tasted the goodness of God in granting me salvation through Jesus Christ, my dear Redeemer; and my joy no man taketh from me." After a short pause, she continued to speak, holding the hand of Mrs Henderson in both of hers. "Oh my dear friend! you are a Christian; you know the joy, the holy rapture of a union with God, through his Son, our blessed Saviour! You will feel in your last hour, as I feel now, that such a prospect as I see opening before me, is cheaply purchased by a life of suffering and sorrow."

Mrs Henderson smiled through the tears which chased each other, unheeded, down her pale cheeks. "God grant I may have such a foretaste of heaven," she said; "it is truly the reward of righteousness; and if sincerity of faith, manifested by unwearied continuance in well-doing, can earn it, I am sure it is your due."

"Oh, nothing is my due," said the dying saint; "I am an unprofitable servant; and should have been so, if I had done all my master commanded me to do. I claim no merit. I feel that, of myself, I can do nothing. I never could. I feel that my heart is deceitful above all things, and self cries for indulgence to the last; and were it not for that gracious influence of God's holy spirit, which is freely offered to all, I should never have learned to know good from evil; but should have trusted to vanities and lies, and perhaps have followed my foolish imaginations, till led into wickedness and vice. I know I am naked, and blind, and miserable, whenever I leave my heavenly guide, and sink into my own nothingness. But thanks be to God, there is abundance of grace, and it is

freely given to all; without money and without price, if we look through Jesus for it. I have richly partaken of this bounty, and found strength for every trying hour; and now I go to him, to receive that crown of rejoicing, which he has reserved for me, and to enter those happy mansions which my blessed Saviour has prepared for each of his faithful followers; even for me—for the least, the meanest of those who have loved him till death."

"Dear mother," said one of the daughters, who was leaning over her pillow, "do not exhaust yourself by talking so long."

"I do not exhaust myself, daughter," she replied; "I feel strong in the Lord. I am easy. Death comes disarmed of all his terrors. My God deals gently with me. Yet I am willing to bear a parting struggle if he sees it best for me. The joy which is set before me is too great for me to have a thought about the pains that may close my life. My blessed Lord and Master," she continued, after a momentary suspension of her breath, "my dear Redeemer had harder pains and greater agonies to bear than any of his disciples are ever called to endure; and shame and ignominy too! And he despised it all, knowing the greatness of the reward that was set before him; and shall I complain even if I am called to suffer? No, no. I will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

"I wish the gay world of thoughtless beings could see and hear you as I do," said Mrs Henderson.

"They will, I trust, come to the knowledge of the truth and live," said the old lady, "and enjoy, as I do, the hope of salvation. If they could only taste the happiness of a true and lively faith, no worldly treasures would tempt them to part with it. What have I had but this, for my crown of rejoicing? It has been the source of daily and

constant support, when every worldly joy, one after another, was taken away: and when I was permitted to enjoy worldly prosperity, it doubled my delight to believe it a blessing from God, my kind and heavenly Father. And now he calls me to himself."

Seeing the peculiar hue of death overspreading her hands and arms, her son said in a soft tone, "Mother, I think your end approaches."

"I feel it," she replied. "Death comes truly like the shadow of a cloud, and soon it will close in my mortal life. Receive ye all, the last blessing of your dying mother."*

She ceased to speak; and the group of watchful beings around, gazed in silence on the last efforts of the spirit to animate dissolving nature. Mrs Henderson kneeled with the mourners round the bed; the glazed eyes of the dying woman became fixed; the leaden hue overshadowed and deepened on her face, and one convulsive sob marked the departure of the spirit. A solemn silence for some minutes pervaded this little band of weeping Christians; at length the eldest son spoke in a low and tender voice, but firm and unbroken in its utterance.

"Our dear mother is removed from mortal scenes," he said. "It is proper we should ask that aid to bear our heavy affliction, which God alone can bestow; and which is required to bind up our broken hearts."

While each one who kneeled around the bed remained silent, waiting for the outpouring of their brother's spirit in holy prayer, he also kneeled, and clasped his hands, and raised his closed eyes, in a momentary silent petition; and then opened his lips in fervent supplication that a submissive spirit might be granted to each one of those

* This whole picture is from life.

whom the will of God had called to mourn the loss of their best earthly friend, and the head of their little family; and in thanksgiving for the instructions they had received through her life and in her death. At the conclusion of this address to the throne of grace, they all slowly arose, and in a short time began to consult on the steps proper to be taken. Mrs Henderson offered to procure assistance, or in any way to make herself useful. But they modestly declined any aid, assuring her they were competent to performing the last duties to the remains of their dear mother; and did not wish the sanctity of their feelings to be invaded by the presence of a stranger.

This state of feeling was so perfectly in accordance with Mrs Henderson's, that she offered no objection. The son named the day of interment, and requested her to attend; which having promised, and finding nothing more to detain her, she silently withdrew, and with her son, returned to the noisy, thoughtless world, in the city.

Mrs Henderson forbore to make any remarks to her son upon the scene at which they had been present. It was one of those impressive but natural occurrences, to which she had looked, and hoped her son might witness, in the belief that such events were best calculated to sink into his heart, and work a change in his feelings favorable to the perception of religious truth. And powerful as her own emotions had been, she had not lost sight of the effect it might, by the blessing of God, and her own improvement of the opportunity, have on the mind of her son. She neither wished nor felt disposed to interrupt its influence, by any observations of her own at the time. Their ride, therefore, was mostly a silent one. What remarks occasion required, she made in a tone of gentle affection, neither marked by gloom nor vivacity.

When they reached home, George found his friend, Edward Burrel, waiting for him. When Mrs Henderson passed into the parlor, he joined George at the door, and said in a tone of merry exultation, "I waited for you a long time, George, because I was resolved not to go till I could see you, to tell you, I wish for your company this evening."

"I cannot go," said George.

"You must," said Edward: "not at our house, but at Mr Seymour's. The old gentleman and his wife have gone to New York. We shall have a fine time. I am sure the Reverend doctor will be there. I have been conning over some pretty knotty points to set upon him. I think I shall worry him tonight."

George hardly had patience to listen. Never was there a more unfortunate moment for Edward Burrel to have given such an invitation; and could Mrs Henderson have dictated a circumstance to fix and confirm the impression she wished to have made on George's mind, she could not have devised one more to her purpose; to such, under Providence, she had trusted, in conjunction with reason and affection, to produce the change she so ardently desired. George made a hasty excuse of engagement; but when pushed, truth obliged him to confess it was only a mental one, and that his feelings were just now adverse to the proposed plans. He was, therefore, pressed no further; and, jumping into the chaise, drove off, leaving his young friend in amazement at the change in his former associate.

Having resigned the horse and chaise to proper care, George felt for a moment undetermined whither to direct his steps. He inquired mentally of himself, "To take his usual walk on the Mall, or on Fort Hill,

or over the Western Avenue? No: he would meet a busy world, just at the sunsetting hour, and he wished not then to mingle with a crowd.—A visit to some of his young friends? Which? Each of his friends of both sexes presented themselves in idea; but he shook his head as they were contemplated in succession. One was trifling; another sarcastic; this one a coquette; that one a fop; he was selfish; she cold-hearted; this weak-minded, that dogmatical; none were inviting at that moment; most were ignorant, and some impious. "I will go by myself," he said, "and commune with my own heart." And thus deciding, he turned his steps towards his father's house.

It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to trace out the course of his reflections, as he paced back and forth in his room; stopping now and then to gaze on the gorgeous sky, where multitudes of clouds, piled mountain high, were reflecting the burning rays of the lately departed sun, and speaking a joy of nature, totally in opposition to his present feelings. And when, after the sombre hues of night had wrapped every object in a darkness more congenial to his state of mind, he seated himself at the open window, and laid his head back to feel on his burning forehead the cool night air; still, it would be a vain attempt to reduce to language the various and contending emotions of his heart. The trains of thought that rapidly passed and repassed through his deeply touched and excited mind, defied all order and expression.

"What a scene I have witnessed, and how has my soul been smitten this afternoon; and how did my mother's last words, in our ride out, burn into my heart! And with such feelings as I have seen manifested in that house of death, and with which my mother so truly sym-

pathizes, how must her kind heart have been wrung with anguish, by my late conduct and the expression of such opinions and sentiments as mine! And how I have exulted in possessing and declaring those sentiments! And how often urged her, in no filial manner, to hear me defend my opinions! And she, with the temper of an angel, never harshly reproving—never uttering one word of reproach—never exclaiming at my folly, or protesting against my wickedness! But wicked and cruel I have been, thus to torture the heart of a fond mother! Of such a mother! Thus to exasperate and provoke a father, who was kind and forbearing beyond measure, since he understood, as I now do, the grief of my mother's soul at my unfeeling conduct. A wretch indeed I am, such as I never before conceived myself to be; and deserving the severest censure instead of that unwearied tenderness of affection which I have received."

It was not that George was struck with any sudden conviction of the truth of that revelation which he had denied and derided; or that he was oppressed with a painful sense of his sins, as he thought they must appear to the all-seeing eye of God. These were feelings and convictions that were yet far off. He had indeed been deeply impressed by the simple and unaffected manifestation of christian faith at such an hour; by the great support and comfort it afforded in the season of suffering and sorrow. He had been struck with amazement and awe to perceive the triumph over the fear of death, and the joyful hope, which it gave to the dying Christian. All that he had observed had made a deep impression; but the feeling which now was strongest and best defined, was a sense of his error and baseness, in ridiculing and striving to remove from those who possessed it, this lively

and operative belief. He called to mind the observation his mother had made to him, that when pride and prejudice allowed him to examine the subject candidly, he would perceive it to be a dictate of benevolence to conceal within his own bosom his disbelief, and would consider it cruelty to utter a word that could raise a doubt in the mind of a believer. He sighed deeply when he remembered the mild rebuke of his mother; and he resolved, whatever his religious views and opinions continued to be, he would studiously avoid expressing his sentiments; and by renewed attention to his parents, endeavor to restore peace to their hearts as far as sincerity would permit. Having in some degree soothed his feelings by these reflections and resolutions, he sat another hour, musing, and gazing at the starry heavens, which, to every mind of lively sensibility and active thought, opens many treasures for feeling and speculation. There was much to swell his bosom, and it did swell. And he at least had perception of great and glorious truths, as he silently traced his way, in imagination, to those bright unknown bodies, and felt with awe and rapture, that "the hand which made them is divine." "The same hand," said he, rising, and again gently pacing his room, "The same almighty agency made me also; gave me this thinking principle so restless within; and adapted my external form to it. That I have a being, and do exist, I feel, and am sure; it is not a subject to reason about; it is a self-evident proposition, which nothing can prove or disprove. Here I am. That I did not form myself is equally certain. That Infinite Mind is the author of my being, and all things that I behold in the natural world, I must acknowledge, because it is the most rational of all the suppositions which I can make: and let me account

for the origin of all things as I will, I am brought back to this at last. But why were all things created? and what is our destiny?" Such thoughts, without guide or compass to direct him, soon cast his mind upon an ocean of conjecture and uncertainty as usual; but in his present feelings, his mind, for the first time, turned to the possibility of a communication from the Author of our being as to light and comfort. "If all doubt could be removed," he thought, "and a moral certainty be given, that we have received instruction on these points from an infinite source, it would indeed impart repose to the soul." But no sooner did this idea arise, than the arguments which he was accustomed to employ to prove its absurdity rushed into his mind. They did not, however, bring with them the usual confidence and satisfaction.

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On the day appointed for the funeral of Mrs Henderson's friend, the widow Brown, George lingered in the parlor after breakfast, as if something more than usual occupied his mind and detained him. At length he inquired of his mother if she intended going to Dorchester. On being answered in the affirmative, he asked, who would go with her?

"Your father, my dear;" replied Mrs Henderson "Why do you ask?"

"I thought you might wish me to go with you," he replied, "and if so, I should need to make arrangements for it this morning."

"If you are willing to go with me," said his mother, "and can leave your business, I shall be quite glad; for though your father is desirous of paying this tribute of respect to the memory of our friend, yet it will put him to great inconvenience."

George said he should be pleased to take the place of his father; and his mother frankly expressed a grateful sense of his attention.

The conversation between the mother and her son

during their ride to the house of mourning, was of a moral and serious cast, but nothing showed any decided change in George's feelings, till Mrs Henderson made some remark, such as frequently fell from her, respecting the manifestation of divine benevolence in all the natural and moral world. "I think," she continued, "it gives a new force and beauty to all that we admire, to be able to trace the hand of a merciful God through all creation."

"I wish," said George, "you could find any way to give me a perception of this benevolence, in supposing God the author of that strange system that is called the christian revelation."

"Is it possible you can think that God has no concern for the multitude of beings he has created," asked Mrs Henderson.

"No," replied her son; "on the contrary I believe he has considered their welfare in all his works. I see evident testimonies of his care in the creation around us; every thing is adapted to the wants and enjoyments of his creatures. I believe all we see was made by God for the use and comfort of his intelligent offspring. But I do not suppose that a Being infinite in power and glory as well as in goodness, will concern himself about the petty circumstances of beings whose whole existence, and even the world they inhabit, are but as a point in his view, and as a moment in duration. That we should suppose ourselves important enough to occupy the thought or attention of infinite mind appears to me such an evidence of presumption, that no one who is justly impressed with a sense of God could ever entertain such an idea."

"Your sentiments are not unnatural, my dear son," replied his mother, "and result from the narrowness of a young mind. It is long, very long, that we must think

and reason, before we can sufficiently expand our conception to embrace a tolerably consistent notion of the attributes of God. It is truly said, 'we cannot find out God unto perfection.' The very terms, Infinite, Eternal, Deity, and all the phraseology we use to designate our imperfect conceptions of the Almighty, if we try to define the ideas attached to them, we perceive to be mere words expressive of that abyss of vastness and uncertainty as to the nature and mode of the divine existence, which a finite mind can never stretch itself to comprehend. But there is a point from which to commence inquiry, that will not fail to conduct us to truth. We can take the foundation of God's goodness. We agree in thinking that nothing must contradict this first great truth."

"Certainly," replied George, "it is, because I must maintain that point, that I cannot tolerate the Christian's creed."

"We can sometimes perceive a truth," said Mrs Henderson, "when it comes to us by analogy, that we can see in no other way; because we thus rid ourselves of the associated notions which interfere and prevent us from viewing the subject correctly. Let us then suppose a case, and see if your mind will not view the subject differently when thus presented. It is not essential that the analogy should be close, or hold in all its parts. It will be sufficient for our purpose, if we compare things we can understand with those we cannot, so as to throw light on one point, as our Saviour did, when he compared God to an earthly father. We will suppose a man of great wealth to procure a tract of land in a new country, and employ agents to clear and cultivate it. He lays out the grounds in beautiful order, and erects a commodious dwelling and offices. The various gardens, pleasure grounds, and

wood lands, the fields for grain, and the orchards—all, are arranged and enclosed, in the most perfect manner. The mansion house is conveniently and elegantly furnished; the farm stocked; and every thing provided for the comfort, convenience, and enjoyment of the owner and his family. Suppose yourself to be travelling, and come to this spot. You would naturally be struck with the beauty and order, as contrasted with the wilderness around, and would be inclined to examine the estate.—You walk through the fields. They are waving with ripened grain. The trees are loaded with fruit. The flowers are blooming around. The whole is inviting, and bespeaks the object, as well as the wealth, and taste of the owner. You inspect the place still farther. Flocks of sheep on the hill pastures, herds of cattle in the meadows, domestic fowls and small animals, and all that could be thought necessary or desirable have been collected, and arrangements made for their comfort. You enter the house, and there also, every thing seems to show that the master must be on the spot. The table is spread. The library displays its inviting riches. The chambers ask you to repose.—But where is the owner of this estate? Where is he, who directs and superintends the whole? Who concerns himself, to protect the flocks and the herds? to secure the harvest, and see the fruits gathered and preserved? What would you think if in answer to these inquiries you should be told, that having done so much, the proprietor then abandoned his work; that after having thus arranged every thing, he had taken no farther concern about it, had never either made a visit or sent a messenger to it, or in any other way exercised the least particular superintendence over it? What should you think if you were told as a reason for this

neglect, that he thought it beneath his dignity to visit the estate or to take any care of it? Would it not be natural for you to ask, why then did he make this grand establishment? why build the house? why stock the farm? Should you not say, that if he condescended to clear the wilderness, and lay out and plant the grounds, and erect the buildings, it would not be unworthy of him to see them well taken care of? that it was a proof of folly, to do so much, and then abandon it; and still worse, that it was cruel to collect flocks and herds, and animals that could not secure their own comfort and happiness, and then leave them without a keeper? that whatever it was worth his while to place there it was proper to watch over and preserve, and that it was so inconsistent with the character manifested in the whole arrangement to suppose he would thus abandon his own work, that you could not believe any one who should intimate such a thing. Yes, you would say, every thing speaks of his concern for his estate; and the ability, taste and skill displayed, are not qualities consistent with the fickleness and cruelty of such a desertion. You would not therefore credit the story of his indifference to it, but would seek the proofs of the proprietor's interposition throughout the estate; assured, that where every thing showed a system complete in its several parts, it would betray an essential defect, if the contriver were not employed in conducting and maintaining the whole, for the happiness of those he had collected there."

George remained silent a few minutes after his mother ceased to speak; and seemed to be considering the statement she had made. At length he said, "I should certainly come to the conclusion you suggest in the case supposed; and if I could trace a perfect analogy between

this and the subject of my inquiry, I should have nothing farther to urge against the doctrine of a revelation from God to mankind, abstractly considered. There would still, indeed, be a great deal to object to in that, which is by Christians pretended to be from God. But, I confess, it seems reasonable to suppose that a Being, such as God, would not be less likely to consult the good of the world he has made, in any suitable manner, than the proprietor you have imagined, to consult the safety and improvement of his estate. Nevertheless, is it not true that your analogy is incomplete? God, you know, has other worlds than this. They are doubtless innumerable, and what is the one we live in, compared with the universe? How does your analogy show, that it may not be unworthy of him to interfere in a special manner in the affairs of so minute a portion of his works? Had you provided your wealthy landholder with a multitude of estates, each of which was equal or superior in beauty and value to the one you described, you would have lessened the apparent absurdity of his supposed conduct in abandoning that one, and thus made a better argument from analogy."

"Not at all," replied his mother; "for the question still remains, why make all this provision for convenience and enjoyment in any estate, however small, and then abandon it?—why, if it was not to be visited, and watched over, and improved, should it ever have been procured and fitted up at so great an expense? Now let a like question be put respecting the Deity, as he stands related to this world. Infinite as his power and glory are acknowledged to be, his wisdom and goodness are certainly equal to them. And if the attribute of power renders the superintendence of the world of no

moment to him, how could the attributes of wisdom and goodness ever have permitted its creation? The world which his power enabled him to create, his wisdom would induce him to superintend, and his love incline him to bless. By supposing God not to be interested in what is taking place in our world, as in the transactions of all other worlds, to believe that an individual is unregarded by our heavenly Father, is to detract from his glorious attributes of omnipresence and omniscience. God is infinite in the minutiæ, which are inscrutable to man, as he is infinite in the comprehension of exalted and extensive things. We stand on a point. Infinity is above, beyond, beneath, and around us; and that which requires microscopic, equally with that which requires magnifying powers, to give us a perception of its existence, is and must be comprehended in the survey of almighty vision; and in every moment of its being be wholly within his knowledge and under his care. And if we perceive this must be the case in the natural world—because it exists and could no otherwise exist—how much more easily can we conceive it to be true in the spiritual and moral world, since we must believe that God is a spiritual being, and these things must therefore be more nearly allied to him. If you suppose God to have abandoned the world and its countless multitudes of animate and inanimate beings which he has created, you also subtract either from his attribute of omnipotence, or from that of benevolence; for if he can, but will not, superintend and bless them, he is not a good being, and if he would, but cannot, his power is impeached. Believing then, as we must believe, that he possesses the attributes of wisdom, power, and goodness—and that omnipresence results from them, we are compelled to believe that he constantly

superintends the world, to bless and preserve every creature he has made in every moment of its existence, and that if at any time his rational offspring need a special revelation, he grants it to them."

"Why is it then that mankind are not good and happy?" asked George.

"The answer to that question," replied his mother, "involves a subject of great interest and difficulty. The origin of evil has troubled many a devout mind, and been a stumbling block to those who would 'vindicate the ways of God to man.' To me it appears the necessary result of the compound nature it pleased God to bestow on us, and essential to the completion of his plan in our creation. But to discuss it would occupy more time than we have now at our disposal, and also lead us away from our present object; I can answer generally, that the system is yet incomplete, and therefore there cannot be perfect harmony and uninterrupted happiness. It is necessary that we should pass through an imperfect state of being, and be tried by evils. When the whole design of God in the creation of the world is finished, and all his intentions made manifest, the happiness which his benevolence wills for us will be established, and will appear to be his glory."

"After all," said George, "I do not see that I in anything contradict this glorious character of God, for it harmonizes with all my views. I only differ from you in considering it more according to the dignity and glory of God to superintend the world by means of general laws, established at the creation, and never interrupted, than by means of occasional corrective interpositions."

"A wider extent of thought," replied Mrs Henderson, "will convince you that your notion of general laws, and pre-established harmony, and the routine of means

which human ingenuity has devised to save omnipotence trouble and preserve his dignity, is the result of narrow views, limited powers, and short-sighted wisdom; and that it is making distinctions graduated to our own littleness rather than to the characteristics of the Deity."

"But supposing the truth of what you say, I cannot in the least comprehend how you can believe that such a being as you allow God to be, could consistently create mankind with a determination even before creation, to condemn a certain number to eternal punishment, and to reserve but a small portion for a blessed inheritance after death."

"It is not essential to the belief of the christian revelation to hold such opinions," said Mrs Henderson. "I do not believe any doctrine which is at variance, as the one you mentioned is, with the attribute of divine goodness."

George was astonished at this remark, for he had conceived this to be an essential article of christian faith.

"Do you not believe, then," asked he, "that we all come into the world with a nature totally depraved and incapable of all good unless the irresistible grace of God, to which we were foreordained, is sent to save us?"

"Certainly not," replied his mother; "so far from it, we are told by our Saviour, that when we are regenerated we become like little children, and of such are the kingdom of heaven; and that we can never enter into heavenly happiness until we become like them in innocence and confiding love."

"Why, my dear mother," said George, "I am afraid you are no more of a Christian than I am; for the more I penetrate into your mind, the more I perceive it is in unison with mine."

"Yet we are widely separated, George," replied his mother, "in this, that I believe and am happy in the belief of divine revelation by Jesus Christ, in and through whom I hope for salvation. While you have no such faith."

"True," said George, "there I acknowledge we differ entirely. I do not, I cannot believe that God, infinitely benevolent and just, would be so exasperated by the sins of mankind as to require the suffering and death of his only and dear son to satisfy his vengeance. Nor can I believe that the death of an innocent person could have the smallest direct agency in restoring a sinner to innocence and holiness. A sinner he must still remain, as I believe, until he see his own wickedness and repent of it, and amend his life; and then a benevolent God might freely pardon him; but not by means so absurd and inconsistent with the divine character as the doctrine of atonement implies."

"In all this," said his mother, "I agree with you."

"What, not believe in the atonement?" asked George.

"Not in the popular view of it which you have given," answered Mrs Henderson.

"How, then, do you believe Jesus Christ procured salvation for mankind?" inquired George.

"Not by any change his death wrought in God, rendering him in any degree more able or more willing to forgive sinners than he was before our Saviour appeared; but by the change produced in the hearts and lives of mankind," said Mrs Henderson.

"And how do you think those changes in mankind were to be effected?" asked George.

"By our Saviour's showing the way of righteousness in his precepts and example, and declaring the whole will of God and his merciful dispensation to mankind. By his showing the insufficiency of any service but a willing and spiritual service, of any devotion but that of the heart and life. By his assurance of a life to come, in which the state of each individual will be determined by the character he formed on earth. And finally, by his submitting to persecution, sufferings, and death, and thereby proving his sincerity in the great cause for which he appeared in the world; leaving his followers an example under every trial; and establishing the truth of his declarations, by rising himself from the dead."

Here George was upon the point of interrupting his mother, with an expression of incredulity, but he checked himself, and inquired "if Jesus Christ used any other means to convince mankind?"

"To convince mankind that he was the long expected Messiah was one object; to effect a change in their characters another," said Mrs Henderson. "His miracles were the great evidence of the former; what I have been mentioning had the latter for their object; and besides these means, there were others, especially his encouraging promises of spiritual assistance to all his disciples, to the end of the world; giving them the hope of glory and happiness in the presence of God for ever."

"I must confess," said George, "that my ideas on this subject were very different; and I did not suppose such contradictory notions were entertained respecting the mission of Jesus Christ. This very circumstance is against its validity; for if the advocates of revelation cannot agree among themselves, how ridiculous it is to sup-

pose they can find out the truth, who can see only through the medium of others."

"Take the scriptures for your guide," said Mrs Henderson, "and unsophisticated reason for your interpreter, and you will find no difficulty."

"I am astonished by your account," said George. "I have been told that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, and coequal with God; that he is self-existent, and independent, and infinite; and indeed is very God—as in truth he must be, if he be infinite, as it is clear there cannot be two Infinite Beings;—that this very God clothed himself with a human form and came into our world to suffer persecution and an ignominious death, in order that God, who is at the same time his father and himself, might have his wrath, at the sins of his finite creatures, appeased, by an infinite punishment; so that divine justice might be satisfied, and men be redeemed from the consequences of sin, which their forefather Adam committed, and by which he communicated a depraved nature to his posterity. And yet," continued George, after a moment's pause, "it was declared to me, that though God himself, in the person of his own son Jesus Christ, had suffered and died, to render mercy and forgiveness of sin possible, yet it was only a few who would be pardoned, and the rest of mankind would be doomed to eternal punishment, and that without their being able to help themselves, or by any conduct to avert their fate. Now all these views, which form by no means the whole catalogue of absurdities, which I was taught to believe were the doctrines of revelation, are so inconsistent with the manifest attributes of God, that I could not believe them."

"I have told you many times," said his mother, "that you have not just notions on the subject; and that when

your feelings are so far influenced by the belief of this fact, as to render you willing to be convinced that you are in an error—as soon as you no longer take pleasure in supporting infidelity, the path will be plain which will conduct you to a belief in Christianity. You will lay by your former notions, and examine carefully the simple histories of Jesus Christ, as written by the apostles. You will then study a few good writers on the evidences of their authenticity; and the whole subject will assume a different aspect, and bring conviction to your mind."

"I do assure you, mother," replied George, in a manner expressive of sincerity and affection, "my feelings have very much changed since conversing so freely with you; and though I have not felt any disposition to become a convert to Christianity, nor perceived any proof of its divine authority, I no longer take a pride in opposing it, as I did. And you have given me such new views, that I begin to lose the feeling of disgust that I have always before entertained for the subject. Besides," he continued in a tone of voice that denoted a solemnity of mind, as new as it was gratifying to his mother, "I have seen the wonderful power of that faith which I so often derided. I do believe the woman I saw die, possessed more than mere resolution to meet her fate. She evidently was supported by a hope and belief of future happiness; and was not only willing, but desirous to lay her body in the grave, so certain was she of rising to a better state of existence. I felt that scene deeply, and shall never lose the impression it made on my mind."

Mrs Henderson listened to the avowal of these sentiments with emotions of joy and gratitude, which it would have been impossible for her to express. She said in reply, "It was indeed a touching scene, and a sympathizing

heart, like yours, could not fail to harmonize with the humble and unaffected piety displayed by each member of that christian family. It was calculated to make you, for the time at least, cast away your infidel thoughts. God is worshipped in many such obscure abodes, and from such lowly habitations there often arise the purest incense and the most acceptable offering he ever receives from his dependent creatures."

"I believe it," replied George.

"That you may rise to the same feeling and perception of the divine character," continued his mother, "and form a just estimation of all the means his infinite wisdom and goodness have devised to elevate his creatures to a purer and happier state of existence, is the ardent wish and earnest prayer of your parents; and the hope you have now awakened in me, is a source of indescribable joy and thankfulness."

The tenderness and affection implied in this observation thrilled through George's heart; and it might have been difficult for him to calm the swell before it overflowed, had they not been approaching the house of mourning. The great difference of his feelings at this time, and when he last visited that humble dwelling, could not escape his own observation; he was sensible that his mind had been enlightened, and his prejudices softened, and his feelings warmed by the conversations he had held with his mother, and by the interesting scene he had witnessed, when the widow Brown breathed her last in the midst of her children. In such a state of mind he felt no repugnance, when they arrived, to join in paying the last respects to the good old lady, and depositing her remains in her last silent habitation.

The spiritual principle in man may be compared to a costly vase of exquisite workmanship—which is bestowed on each of us, that we may fill it according to the dictates of our own will. Information is at the same time communicated, as to the nature of those things we may, and those we must not receive into it; of what will prove a rich cordial, or a deadly poison, if admitted. The holy influences of God are pouring gently, but constantly, from the pure fountain of eternal lòve, and in such abundance, that each one who chooses may dispose his vase so as to receive the treasure, till it is filled; and whoever does this will be rich, wanting nothing more to make him happy here and hereafter. But various evil influences are spread around us also; and if we do not carefully watch and exclude the evils which are always ready to flow into it, we shall fail to receive such a portion of God's spirit, as will fill our vase, and secure our happiness. One principle is in the vase when we receive it. This principle is self, and it too often happens that it is immersed in evils, before the holy spirit has been received sufficiently to preserve it from contamination.—It cannot be supposed, that George Henderson's heart had been kept free from the various evils produced by ignorance of religious truth and goodness, and by the bad example of those who were equally or still more deluded; nor that the selfish principle in his bosom remained uncontaminated by these evils. Though by no means vicious in heart or habit, he was like most young persons similarly situated, very far from that pure and elevated state of feeling and principle, which is essential to christian excellence, and which is productive of temporal and eternal peace. But the deep impressions made on his feelings and understanding were working within him;

and his spirit was yielding by degrees to the circumstances and influences in which he was placed. Pride, however, was still strong in his bosom; and though he now felt an interest in the subject of revealed religion, and an earnest desire to examine critically the whole ground of revelation, and all that had been adduced as evidence of its truth; yet he would have been ashamed to have it discovered that he was thus devoted to religious studies. By the indulgence of this mistaken pride he placed himself in a situation, which often greatly retarded his progress, and caused him unnecessary trouble and anxiety; as it effectually shut the door to assistance from those, who could easily have cleared up a doubt, or guided him in his researches. He did however labor on; and though his work was by this course protracted and rendered tedious, yet he persevered diligently whenever he could steal time and opportunity to read and study unobserved, and procure books without exciting any notice or suspicion of his object. His task was somewhat arduous, for his was not a mind to take a superficial view of the ground, or to rest satisfied with a partial examination of the subject, now that prejudice was in a measure removed, and the traditions of men separated from the doctrines of Jesus Christ. He proceeded systematically in his investigation; and having obtained a knowledge of the proper course of study, he pursued it steadily. A perusal of the scriptures, especially of the New Testament, with such critical explanations as he found necessary, and of the various evidences in support of their authenticity, was the preliminary step. Examination of the doctrines and character of Jesus Christ, and of the effect they were calculated to produce on the feelings and conduct, when fully received and acted upon; the comparison of this sys-

tem as a moral code with those of ancient philosophy; and the view of its effects on society since the introduction of Christianity; such were the subjects of his critical inquiries, and occupied much of his time and thoughts.

It cannot be supposed that this process was a short one. That a youth naturally cheerful and even gay in his temperament, blessed with full health, and constant occupation, and by the kind providence of God placed in a situation of comparative ease and prosperity, should abstract himself from all other concerns and devote himself exclusively to the pursuit in which we have said George engaged, would be neither natural nor desirable. It is a principle in nature, that nothing violent can be permanent. And however good an object may be in itself, and however beneficial it may prove to those who attain it, there is little hope of perseverance in its pursuit, or lasting exertion in its favor, when every other object is laid by, and all the powers, physical and moral, are intemperately bent on the single point of its attainment. Hence it too often happens that when young persons, who are naturally susceptible of excitement, are urged by the efforts of others into an unnatural state of feeling on religious subjects, they make a great show of zeal for a short time, and then leave the pursuit, and their hearts become more callous and irreligious than before.

If it be possible so to educate children, religion should 'grow with their growth, and strengthen with their strength.' Fixed in the first days of infancy on their innocent and affectionate hearts as a sentiment of grateful love to a kind and benevolent Father in heaven, who watches over them to protect them and make them good and happy; it should gradually be unfolded to their understandings, and impressed on their minds, and ren-

dered dear to their affections by gentle and judicious instruction and unceasing example. They should be trained with a delicate and tender regard to the state of their feelings and the strength of their intellect; giving a right direction to their affections, till a fixed habit of thought and devotion is formed, and by degrees they are led to look deeply into their own hearts and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and thus, studying the scriptures and reforming their tempers, they become mature Christians.

When unfortunate circumstances interrupt or prevent this process, we must use our best judgments according to the difficulties we need to overcome, to bring the mind into a right state; always remembering that the operations of God in nature, are silent, slow, gentle, and often imperceptible in their progress, and that whoever wishes to make a deep and lasting impression without risk of injury in other points, must imitate the divine wisdom.

The result of George Henderson's honest and patient investigation no rational mind can doubt; but during the period of his religious inquiry, no extraordinary outward manifestation betrayed uncommon seriousness of mind, or sadness of feeling. To a casual observer little, if any, change would have been apparent in his manners or conduct. To his parents indeed, the keen watchfulness of whose eye nothing could escape, there was much to encourage and delight. They knew not how their son was taking hold of the subject; they forbore to inquire what were his objects, or to pry into his thoughts or employments farther than he chose to communicate them, or circumstances developed their nature; but they perceived that the reed was bruised and the flax smoking, and

they knew that a heavenly spark was kindling in his heart, and the spirit of pride was yielding. They saw in the little nameless attentions, which he almost unconsciously paid them, that a tenderer affection than he had before felt for his parents was animating his heart; and the casual evidences he gave of self-denial, of subdued temper, of resolute integrity and devotion to duty, told them the holy spirit was cherished, and was working within that bosom to bring it into subjection to the whole will of God. Their secret prayers were still offered in deep and earnest faith that the means might be blessed, which were in operation to effect this object so ardently desired by them.

It was on a Sunday evening in the following spring, when the atmosphere possessed that peculiar softness so powerful in its effects on the mind, the influence of which is as mysterious as it is certain; George had been to church all day with his father and mother, and they had conversed on the subjects of the sermons; but in a general manner, and without any personal application or remark. As the sun declined, and the soft fleecy clouds were gently wafted in large masses over the hemisphere, their edges gleaming with the last rays of the departed sun, George sat pensive and silent, gazing at the heavens. There was in his countenance a peculiar expression of sweet and placid feeling, and his mother fixed her eye upon him with maternal tenderness. Mr Henderson was reading; and a long silence gave each one time to pursue his own train of thought.

"Father," said George, at length rising and approaching Mr Henderson, "I wish to ask you a question."

"Well, my son," said his father, without taking his eyes from his book.

"Do you think it the duty of every person, as soon as he becomes convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the redeemer of the world, to make a public profession of that belief?" asked George.

"It is a positive command of our Saviour to all his disciples," replied Mr Henderson.

"I was not aware of that," said George.

"Do you recollect the circumstances of the last supper, when Jesus instituted the sacrament?" asked his father.

"I do," replied George, "but I conceived it was rather an invitation than a command; and that it was intended only for those immediately present."

"You know," said Mr Henderson, "that Jesus Christ, in his last prayer with his disciples, asks that all the blessings for which he prays may be extended, not only to his immediate disciples, but to every one who should believe on him through their preaching."

"I recollect it," said George.

"If then," said his father, "all believers to the end of the world were included in that prayer, it is to be supposed he also intended to include all in the command to commemorate his death."

"It seems so, indeed," said George.

"There is another passage, which has a bearing on the subject," continued Mr Henderson; "our Saviour said that whoever acknowledges him before men, he will acknowledge before his Father in heaven; and whoever denies him, he will in like manner deny. I consider this perfectly in point, and sufficient to determine every one to make a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ, as soon as he truly and heartily believes in him, and hopes for salvation through him."

"As this declaration of our Saviour was made before the sacrament of the supper was instituted," said George, "may it not have been intended only to allude to the circumstances of the times in which he lived, when it was considered disgraceful to follow Jesus Christ, and confess him to be master?"

"There is a peculiar force and aptness in many of our Saviour's observations," replied Mr Henderson, "which, applying exactly to the situation of the parties addressed, seemed at the moment to have no other bearing; and yet in similar situations, ever since, the same words serve to direct conduct. Allowing then that your remark is just as to the immediate object of that declaration of our Saviour, yet I am justified in considering it applicable to the subject before us; and it is probable that Jesus Christ had it in his view at the time; for although the shame of confessing him for our Lord and master arises from a different source at the present day from what it did at that time, and though a different manner of making such a profession is prescribed since his death from what the converts were called to make during his life; yet in spirit and essence they are the same, and equally operate to exclude us from being his acknowledged friends, if we refuse to comply with the conditions he gave."

"There are a number of points upon which I wish for farther light," said George, "but I do not know that they are sufficiently important to prevent perfect sincerity in making such a profession. I am particularly desirous to obtain clear and settled notions, that my mind, when engaged in acts of devotion, may not be distracted by contradictory opinions. But I am convinced that we have as firm foundation for faith in Jesus Christ, as a

rational and unprejudiced mind can desire, and, since candidly examining the spiritual wants of mankind, and the exact adaptation of the gospel to supply those wants, I feel the deepest conviction of its divine origin, and the highest gratitude for its promulgation. I am ready therefore to take such steps, as you and my mother may think proper."

The feelings of Mrs Henderson had been affected by the peculiar state of the atmosphere which we have mentioned. She had been indulging a train of tender recollections of her beloved daughter, so long since taken to the bosom of her heavenly Parent. She had gazed on George's face, tracing, as she thought, an increasing resemblance to his departed sister in the serene expression of his countenance; and her heart was full of 'sweet and bitter fancies,' when George interrupted her musings, by addressing his father, and holding the short conversation we have related. The sudden fulfilment of a long cherished hope can be experienced by few without deep emotion. Softened as Mrs Henderson's feelings had been by her previous trains of thought, the declaration, so unexpected, which George made at this moment, was of such a nature as entirely to subdue her. She remained silent, attentively listening to all that was said; and when George made the last appeal to his parents, she laid her head on the table and burst into tears. We will throw a veil over this closing scene of our little history; and conclude with saying, that when the preliminary steps were taken, George went forward in the simple beauty of sincerity, and made a public profession of his new state of mind by becoming a member of a christian church.

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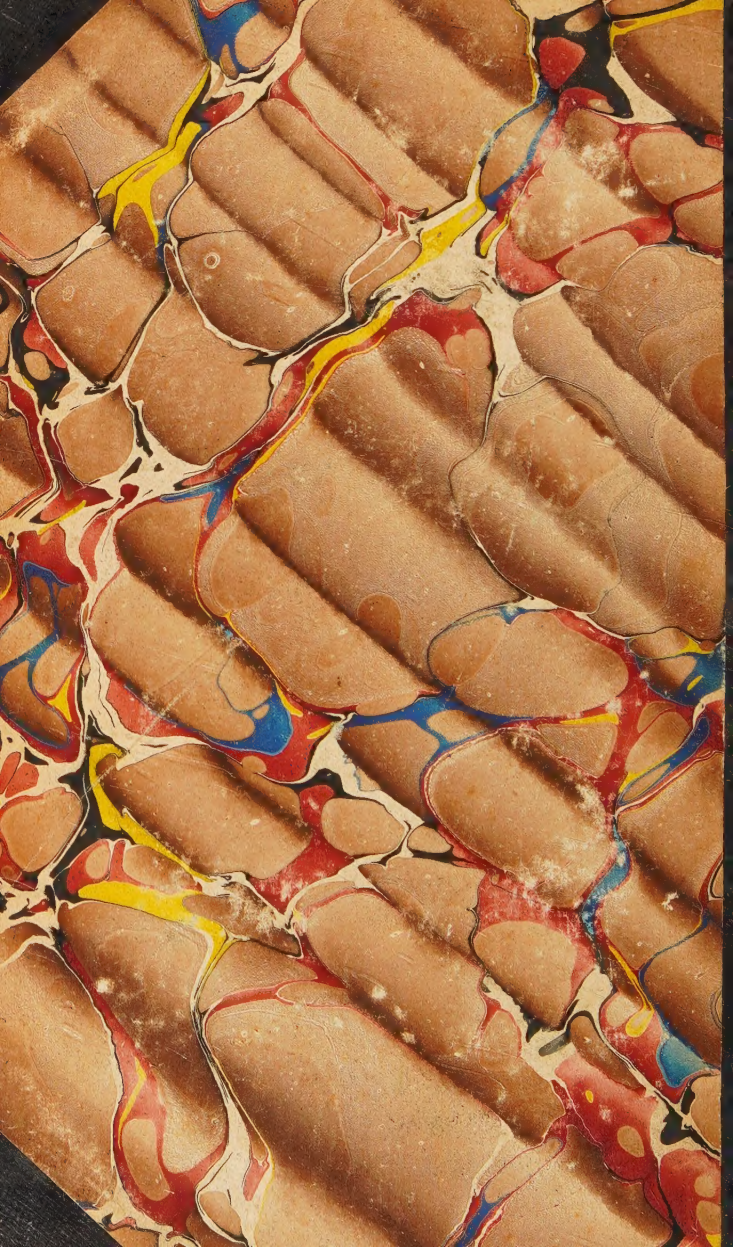
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